

Vibrations

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Relationships:	No Romantic Relationship(s) , TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) & Original Male Character(s) , TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) & Original Character(s)
Characters:	TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Toby Smith Tubbo , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Original Characters , Wilbur Soot , Other Character Tags to Be Added , OC's are not self inserts , Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Niki Nihachu , Dream SMP Ensemble , Original Child Character(s)
Additional Tags:	Minor Character Death , Temporary Character Death , Implied/Referenced Character Death , Suicide Attempt , Suicidal Thoughts , Self-Harm , Blood and Injury , Panic Attacks , Mental Health Issues , Unreliable Narrator , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Fluff and Angst , Running Away , Selective Mutism , Sign Language , British Sign Language , Character Development , Platonic Relationships , Queerplatonic Relationships , Family Dynamics , Accidental Baby Acquisition , Hybrids , Minecraft , Angst with a Happy Ending , It Gets Worse Before It Gets Better , Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , TommyInnit-centric (Video Blogging RPF) , Exiled TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Runaway TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Traumatized TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , BAMF TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Selectively Mute Tommyinnit (Video Blogging RPF) , no beta we die like [redacted] , welcome to the Sean Stan Army
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Vibrations

by [celestialwarden](#)

Summary

Dream, Tommy decided, was a dickhead— and Tommy didn't listen to dickheads anymore. Not after Wilbur and his promises of grandeur, not after Schlatt and his stupid fucking decree, and especially not after Technoblade and his egotistical stories.

So instead of jumping off his tower and watching his brains go splat on the ground by Logstedshire, Tommy let himself fall into the water.

Or,
Tommy runs away during exile and finds a place and people to help him heal. Set over a span of four years.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

alone

Chapter Notes

alone - The index finger moves from behind to in front of the other hand (held vertically) in a swooping “U” motion.

All the chapter titles are words with directions for how to sign them in BSL. I'm not using proper terminology like you'd find in a class because I want everyone to try them out either proper knowledge. I'm also not including facial expressions because they're not consistent/shown in dictionaries and I don't want to get anything wrong.

See the tags for Trigger Warnings, please be safe, people! If anyone of the CC's say they don't want fanfictions of them, this will be removed! I kept everything within the boundaries they've stated. Hope you enjoy :)

Edited 2/10/22

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream, Tommy decided, was a dickhead— and Tommy didn't listen to dickheads anymore. Not after Wilbur and his promises of grandeur, not after Schlatt and his stupid fucking decree, and especially not after Technoblade and his egotistical stories.

So instead of jumping off his tower and watching his brains go splat on the ground by Logstedshire, Tommy let himself fall into the water.

Dream was a dickhead, a dickhead who kept blowing up his stuff, and Tommy was fucking sick of it. So, he left.

And now Tommy was wandering through a forest with barely any sunlight poking through the trees, wishing he had stepped off the other side of that Prime forsaken tower.

In hindsight, it might have been smart to stay in Logstedshire for a bit. Dream said he wasn't coming back for a week, Tommy could have planned and prepared his escape. But no, he just had to be dramatic and stomp off into the horizon with nothing but a jukebox and six torches.

Tommy registered the sound of a bow being drawn behind him, and his body turned into panic mode. Cursing under his breath, he ducked behind a tree and watched an arrow fly by his face. Shit. *Shit*. Had Dream come back and followed him? Or was it Technoblade finishing the job Tommy had been too scared to go through with?

The bow was drawn again, and Tommy hated how his brain tried to bring him back to the prime path where he'd lost his second life. If his survival instincts weren't honed by multiple wars, he might have let himself get lost in the flashback, but Tommy was too used to shoving his panic away in the face of danger.

What did he have on him? His inventory was practically empty thanks to respawning in a crater. He could use the torches to burn his opponent in a pinch...

Another arrow flew by, this one closer than the last, and Tommy could see where it embedded itself into a tree trunk.

Bingo. Whoever was attacking him wasn't a good shot, or they were giving him a warning and didn't expect him to fight back.

Tommy sucked in a breath and lunged for the arrow. With a tug, he ripped out the point and whirled around, already swinging at his attacker. As easy as breathing, Tommy shoved the arrowhead into a ribcage before he could even see who had shot at him.

The skeleton in front of him turned to a pile of bones once Tommy had the clarity to pull the arrow out of its sternum. He could feel his heartbeat in his fingertips, and for what, a measly skeleton? Tommy missed the days where he wore netherite armor and could ignore the annoying mobs that plagued the dark. He shivered and pushed Dream's words out of his mind. No time for panic.

Tommy grabbed the largest of the bones and the skeleton's bow. If the mob had managed to spawn, it meant the sun was going down, and Tommy was about to run into a few more monsters. He considered stopping and building a shelter for the night, but his skin itched just thinking about it. The further from Logstedshire, the better.

Checking the coordinates on his communicator, Tommy pointed himself away from L'manburg. He briefly considered trying to find Techno's "hidden" cabin in the tundra, but he quickly pushed the thought away. Techno might have retired from his thirst for blood, but it didn't mean he would even consider helping Tommy. The best he would get would be a monotone laugh and a door in his face, and the worst would be a visit from Dream to take him back to Logstedshire. Tommy shivered. No way in hell was he going back to that place; they'd have to drag his dead body.

Without shoes or armor on, Tommy's steps were quiet enough to escape notice from most of the mobs. He knew, however, that a zombie could smell him from hundreds of feet away, and a fight would attract others. So, he crept through the brush at an agonizingly slow rate.

A bat flew through the leaves overhead, startling Tommy. He'd been on edge for hours, and it felt like he was a fly trapped in honey. Furiously beating his wings, never further than where he started.

With a deep breath, Tommy shoved the riding panic down as best he could, storing the pressure somewhere behind a sternum. He'd deal with it later. For now, he took his steps through the forest one at a time. The grass was cold under his bare feet, but he'd take it over the burn of obsidian in the nether any day.

A tiny ray of moonlight hit the ground in front of him, illuminating a few mushrooms growing by a tree trunk. Tommy glanced up and noticed a few other patches in the canopy. Praying it wasn't just a clearing, Tommy moved on.

Someone above must have been looking out for him. Tommy stepped out from under the last line of trees onto a barren plain. Somehow, he got through that whole forest without dying. Glancing back at the trees, Tommy noticed they'd grown much thicker and closer together than what he'd seen in the daylight. In fact, if he squinted, he could see the tops of giant mushrooms in the distance. A dark forest.

Tommy elected to completely ignore how close he was to death for the past few hours and instead focused on the terrain ahead of him. Thankfully, it was a grassy plain barren of any trees, and the sun was starting to come up. With some luck, he could avoid the first few mobs in his path and let the rest burn.

Tommy crouched in the grass, letting it cover his whole body, and started to crawl through the stalks. There were no more trees to catch the wind, and Tommy felt himself start to shiver from the cold. Whatever. He'd just have to suck it up and find a coat later.

Time seemed to blend together. A spider on his right. Pause. Coast clear. Keep going. A creeper ahead. Make your way around. Rest. A zombie behind. Let it burn.

Once the sunlight had cleared away the mobs it could, Tommy stood shakily and stretched out his legs. He was going to be so sore tomorrow.

Tomorrow.

The thought seemed a little impossible. He could go anywhere, do anything. If he wanted to sleep away tomorrow, the only thing stopping him would be a hungry stomach, and Tommy had learned to ignore the hunger pains. There were no more vice president duties, no more weapons to craft for war, no more people to put up with.

For the first time since leaving, his mind drifted to Tubbo. Tommy knew there was a compass shoved deep in his inventory, hidden somewhere underneath a stack of planks. He knew if he wanted to go home, he had an arrow pointing directly to it. But Tubbo had exiled him, and if leaving was the best thing Tommy could do for his country, prime-dammit he was going to be the best at it. Fuck Schlatt, fuck Dream, fuck Tubbo. He was leaving and never, ever coming back.

With the warm sun on his arms again, Tommy set off at a brisk pace. Hopefully he could find a village before dark, or he would have to set up a temporary base. How long had it been since he'd slept? But a base would leave tracks, and villagers would talk, and Dream would have something just as good as a compass leading to Tommy.

When Wilbur and he had fled Manburg, they'd gone underground to avoid detection. But Tommy had enough torches to barely light up a hole, and no weapons to defend himself. He could craft a wooden sword, but he'd have to make a crafting table first, and a sword wasn't worth much without a shield, and for that he'd need iron... Tommy groaned.

He stopped in front of a small river that ran through the plains. His arms and face were still covered in soot from the explosions, and his feet were covered in mud and leaves. A quick rinse wouldn't hurt, and if Dream was somehow tracking his scent, it might throw him off.

Tommy splashed the water over his face and almost slapped himself in shock. The water was warm. Unusually warm. He stuck his hand back in the stream and let himself feel the temperature this time. It felt like a potion that'd been left out in the sun for too long, not a cold creek like it should have. Tommy glanced around, searching the bank for something unusual.

Following the river upstream, Tommy kept his eyes peeled for... something. He wasn't sure what could cause something like this. Eventually, the river widened into a lake, and Tommy stopped at a tiny beach. His stomach rolled, partially from hunger and partially from the feeling of sand under his toes.

The lake seemed to stretch on for miles, and Tommy suspected it might actually be a bay that connected to an ocean further away. How far had he travelled to have reached a new ocean? What caught his eye, however, were the stone brick buildings rising from the water.

Tommy had been exploring for years before settling down in L'manburg, and he had never seen a structure quite like this one. He'd seen his fair share of ocean ruins, of course, but they were all hidden deep in the ocean, tucked away behind coral reefs and icebergs.

He waded across the river to the other shore, relishing the warm water around his tired muscles. The magma that was normally trapped under ruins must have heated the shallow water. Whatever it was, Tommy was grateful.

While a majority of the ruins were still underwater, Tommy counted three buildings that were at least partially on solid ground. He approached the first and scanned the area for a chest. Nothing. Tommy sighed— this was going to be a lot harder without a shovel.

He started scooping sand and gravel away with his hands, searching for something harder underneath. Even though the biome was still cold, the warm water around him heated up the area and made him sweat. Just another layer of grime he'd have to wash off.

Tommy's knuckles hit wood, and he scrambled to clear away the spot he was digging at. There, in all its wonderful glory, was a heavily rotting chest. Flinging the top open, Tommy's eyes searched the contents hungrily. There, sitting at the top, was a stone axe. He could have cried from happiness if he wasn't so dehydrated.

Tommy pulled the axe out and inspected the quality. Somehow, the chest had protected everything inside, so the handle was barely worn. The blade had a few nicks in it, like someone had used it to cut down a single tree and left it abandoned in a chest for hundreds of years. Whoever had used it was long dead, and it was Tommy's to keep.

The bottom of the chest was filled with scattered coal and wheat. Somehow, the wheat was as fresh as if it had been harvested minutes ago. Tommy grabbed the bundles and inspected them for mold or rot, but some magic had been placed on them to keep them fresh. He wasn't exactly happy to eat old-as-dirt bread, but it was better than starving to death.

Crafting some of the coal into torches before he forgot, Tommy searched the other two ruins. They were mostly a repeat of the first, excluding the iron axe. He almost missed a scattering of golden nuggets underneath everything else. Tommy almost left them there, gold wasn't going to do him much good, but he grabbed them anyway.

Tommy took a moment to splash some water over his arms and legs, watching the dirt swirl around his knees in little spirals. It would have been mesmerizing if it hadn't been red with blood.

With a stone axe in his hotbar, and wheat ready to be crafted into bread, Tommy readied himself for another long day of travel. He kicked the sand and gravel around to cover his tracks, and headed away from L'manburg.

He let his thoughts wander as his feet moved him across the world. Tommy would need to put another few days of travel between Dream and himself before he felt comfortable leaving any sort of permanent mark. No villages, no shelters, no nothing. He hadn't made it this far just to get dragged back to Logstedshire like a fucking runaway kid. No fucking way.

By the time the sun had started to set, Tommy had reached the edge of the plains biome and was looking at a desert void of anything but cacti and dead bushes. Working quickly, he built a crafting table in the sand and worked his wheat into loaves of bread. Once he was done, Tommy picked up the crafting table and shifted the evidence of his work under the sand. After a few minutes, it blended into the other dunes. Tommy sighed with relief. Thank Prime for sand and gravity.

Tommy took a chunk of a loaf with his teeth and set off again, feeling more energized than ever, even though the food hadn't hit his stomach yet. The feeling of satisfaction, knowing that he could get away from Dream without a trace, that kept him going.

Whoever described deserts as hot, Tommy decided, was a fucking liar. The dunes gave less protection from the wind than the plains did, and the biome seemed to suck all the heat out of the air as soon as the sun set.

Tommy tucked his arms around his torso and pressed on. He might have been able to get away with hiding some sawdust and splinters in the sand, but there was no way he could cover up his tracks if he built a base. Tommy couldn't even tell if he was being over-paranoid anymore, Dream had done a lot crazier things than tracking a teenager into the wilderness. He thought back to the stories Sapnap used to tell him about the team's adventures, back when he and Tommy were still friends. How Dream would make it all the way to the End while avoiding them, his crazy strategies that seemed to come out of nowhere. That was Tommy's enemy, the smartest person on the server. If Tommy was going to survive, just being paranoid wouldn't be enough.

With those thoughts racing through his head, Tommy hadn't realized he'd been clenching his hands until he felt his forearm spasm. He relaxed his arm and tried to shake himself out of it. Tommy needed to be on alert for the nighttime.

There were plenty of husks scattered around his view, but they seemed to have a worse sense of smell than normal zombies. It was almost too easy for him to slip by unseen. To be fair, Tommy was covered in enough dust and sand that he probably blended in.

The monotony of walking was only broken up by Tommy periodically checking the compass to make sure he was walking in the right direction. He felt almost detached from the item he used to consider his most prized possession. The engraving on the side seemed to mock him — Tubbo wasn't his anymore, and Tommy certainly wasn't his. Whatever claim he had on

their friendship ended when Tubbo exiled him. Dream might have been a lying, manipulative bitch, but he couldn't fake the fact that Tubbo hadn't visited him once.

The sun slowly crept up the horizon, turning the once cold desert into what felt almost like the Nether. Thankfully, there were no pits of lava for Tommy to throw himself into. If it had made his aching feet hurt less, he may have considered it.

Whatever desperation Tommy had felt on that tower was gone now, replaced by burning spite. He didn't exactly want to live, but it felt like everyone on the server wanted him dead, so Prime dammit he'd prove them wrong. Even if he suffered through this desert for days on end, he wasn't going to give them the satisfaction.

Tommy shoved the compass back in his pocket and kept trudging through the desert. By now, the sun was high in the sky, and he could feel the water being sucked out of his body. Tommy was certain he had never sweat more, and he regretted not taking that bath earlier in the river. Without it, his sweat and the dirt caked on his skin were mixing into a sticky slosh that was *not* comfortable. He remembered Techno talking about pigs when they were younger, how they would roll in mud to protect their skin from the sun, and wondered if it was actually helping him.

While his bare feet had been helpful in the dark forest, Tommy was really regretting not having shoes now. The sand had heated up to an unprimely temperature, and the soles of his feet were blistered and burned, not to mention extremely sore from walking for days. He glanced down and noticed a few spots of blood by his ankle. That couldn't be good.

With nothing to do but keep going, Tommy ignored the pain and kept walking. He must have been awake for over a day now, right? Tommy remembered pulling all-nighters with Tubbo, joking and talking for hours until they realized the sun was coming up. It was a far cry from the sleepless nights he'd had since Pogtopia. He didn't feel tired, really. Maybe staying up was better in the long run.

The desert slowly turned into rolling hills, sand to gravel, sandstone to andesite and granite. Tommy was eternally grateful for the cool stone on his feet, but after a few steps, noticed a problem. His feet were bleeding enough to leave prints.

Shit.

Tommy crouched and rubbed away as much of the blood as he could, ripping a piece of his shirt off to help. The red sleeve blended too well. After removing as much of the prints as he could, Tommy crawled over to a lone tree, careful of his feet.

He had a few string in his inventory from dead spiders he'd met along the way and was able to grab a few leaves from one of the tree's lower hanging branches. Tommy would have preferred leather or wool, but beggars couldn't be choosers, and the rotting corpse of an animal would have been a dead giveaway. He would have to make do.

Wrapping the leaves around his feet, he wound the string to keep them in place. It was crude and would probably only last for a day, but he had no other options.

Tommy hopped to his feet and tested out his new shoes on the stone. No more blood. He would just have to hope Dream never found the prints.

Just to be safe, Tommy abandoned his straight path away from L'manburg and headed slightly diagonally. In the long run, he'd lose some distance, but he couldn't be predictable if Dream was chasing him.

Ender, Tommy was tired.

The high elevation seemed to pull the air out of his lungs, and every step felt like he couldn't take another. Would it be so bad to find somewhere to sleep?

The thin atmosphere cooled quickly as the sun started to dip in the sky. Was this Tommy's third night without sleep?

His vision swam. He could close his eyes and keep walking, right? Blind people could do it — he just needed a few minutes to rest.

Tommy felt the ground drop from below his feet. Somewhere deep in his mind, he thought he should be worried, but his limbs felt heavy, and his head felt filled with cotton.

Just a few minutes...

Chapter End Notes

That's it for the first chapter! I've got a bunch more written in chunks, so it shouldn't be too long between updates. If there's enough interest, I might make a schedule. No idea how long this will be, but I'm at 14,000 words already, so stay posted. Thanks <3

food

Chapter Summary

food - tips of the fingers touching each other and the mouth

He couldn't keep surviving like this. If it weren't for luck, Tommy would have been dead ten times over by now. As terrified as he was of Dream, if the bitch hadn't found him by now, it might be safe to stop at a village. He needed to sleep in an actual bed, and he needed food, even if it was just scraps from begging.

Chapter Notes

So how are we all feeling with the recent lore developments? I was this close to crying, but I think I'm still emotionally drained from WandaVision. Hope you enjoy the chapter!

Edited 2/10/22

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A familiar groan woke Tommy, and he was already fumbling for his axe before his eyes were open.

The zombie was only a foot away from Tommy, its silhouette outlined by the moon. Tommy was on the ground, somehow, and he couldn't get his feet under him. His hands grabbed the axe handle out of his hotbar and swung.

Tommy heard a squish and felt his axe stop. It was embedded in the zombie's abdomen, almost splitting it in half. He yanked it out, almost falling backwards from the momentum.

The zombie collapsed, whatever magic that gave it life again was gone. Tommy sucked in a breath. What just happened?

He stood up, a bit shaky from the adrenaline, and realized he was in a shallow cave. The wall was just a few meters behind him, the entrance just as close.

Tommy walked out of the cave and stared at his surroundings. He must have fallen into the cave. Tommy wanted to smack himself—he easily could have died, and he never should have stopped in the first place. *Stupid.*

The moon hung low in the sky, and for a second, Tommy thought he had slept almost the whole night. But wait—that was east, the moon was rising. He definitely slept more than a few minutes, his whole body felt stiff from staying on the cave floor for too long.

I slept a whole twenty-four hours, Tommy realized.

Prime, he was a fucking idiot.

As if on queue, Tommy felt his stomach seize. He felt the pain radiate up through his throat, hollow and cold. He hadn't eaten since the desert, had he?

Tommy grabbed a loaf from his inventory and practically inhaled the thing. Fuck, it was stale, but Tommy couldn't care less. He checked the item count—only two left.

He couldn't keep surviving like this. If it weren't for luck, Tommy would have been dead ten times over by now. As terrified as he was of Dream, if the bitch hadn't found him by now, it might be safe to stop at a village. He needed to sleep in an actual bed, and he needed food, even if it was just scraps from begging.

Tommy's stomach clenched again, and he doubled over in pain. *Fucking hell, that hurt.* He tried to sit up and relieve the sudden pressure on his abdomen, but another wave of pain hit him. Tommy groaned, too nauseated to think.

The cold stone under his head gave him some semblance of relief, but it felt like someone was rooting through his stomach.

Just breathe, Tommy.

Tommy internally cursed the voice in his head that sounded way too much like Phil. If it was that easy, he'd just fucking breathe and get over whatever the hell this was.

Breathe.

Oh, fuck off. Tommy counted his breaths, trying to time them with the waves of pain. He really didn't want to throw up, not after just eating a third of his food.

Shit, he must have eaten too fast, right? Tommy barely remembered what life was like before moving to Hypixel, but he could still feel the same cramping feeling in his nightmares. Before Techno came to help them in Pogtopia, Tommy knew Wilbur had been giving him part of his rations and lying about it. He'd found Wilbur curled up in his bed too many times for it to be "just a stomach bug, Tommy."

He missed Wilbur. Missed him so much it hurt just as badly as his stomach. He had ignored it, pretended like Ghostbur was an acceptable substitute, and went on his way. He played the role of vice president again, messed around with Tubbo, and when it wasn't enough to keep him from thinking, he robbed George.

Dirty crime boy, Tommy thought bitterly. It was the exact same thing he'd do with Wilbur—mess around with some people and laugh their asses off about it later. Except this time he'd gone and roped someone else into it and gotten everyone in trouble.

Another wave of pain. His stomach cramped.

He hadn't meant to burn down George's house. Tommy quite liked George, actually, when he wasn't being a bitch.

And then Dream and Tubbo went and kicked him out of the only place that had ever really felt like home, kicked him out of the nation that he built with his brother.

Maybe Wilbur was right. Maybe L'manburg was gone the moment Eret betrayed them.

Phil had told him about Wilbur's dramatic monologue before his death. Even when he was a crazy son of a bitch, he had to go and make it a show. Tommy had shouted at Phil, torn up his newly built house, and ignored anything he had to say. But now, cold and in pain on a lonely mountain, Tommy could do nothing but remember.

Something about that moment in the Final Control room broke Wilbur, and the exile scattered the pieces. Tommy wondered if he was already on the same path. What else could Tubbo's actions be considered as other than betrayal?

Phil may have been the one to stab Wilbur, but he would have died one way or another that day. Stabbed himself, ran at a wither, attacked Dream— anything. He was a dead man walking. And hadn't Tommy been in the same place just a few days ago on top of that tower?

Tubbo's words echoed through his head. *If I can't be the next Schlatt, you can't be the next Wilbur.*

They did a great job with that, didn't they?

Slowly, Tommy felt the pain in his stomach ease. He placed a hand underneath himself and sat up.

The sun had already risen, revealing Tommy's surroundings. He was on the edge of the mountain biome, a river beneath him, and another plain ahead. It was as good a place as any to find a village.

Tommy felt like the whole of his body had been hollowed out, stripped of anything but flesh and an instinctual need to survive. What was he even trying to do? What future was there for

him outside of L'manburg?

Just give up and let Dream find you, someone said. Was it Tommy? He couldn't see anyone around him, the sun had overexposed the world around him.

Despite the words rattling inside his head, Tommy felt his feet carry him forward and forward. He could feel grass under his feet through the bandages, and he was pretty sure he could see trees in the side of his vision. Prime, it was fucking bright.

With his body on autopilot, Tommy felt his mind wandering to other things as he walked. It was going to be Christmas soon, right? He wondered if Tubbo had already gotten him something before exile.

When was the last time he had celebrated? A year ago... where was he a year ago? Tommy couldn't remember if Wilbur and he had already left to travel. If they hadn't, Phil and Techno certainly hadn't been there to celebrate.

Tommy wondered when life had taken a turn for the worst. Maybe it wasn't when Eret betrayed them, maybe it was when they showed up in the SMP. Maybe Tommy should have listened to Wilbur, should have kept following him instead of settling down in Dream's territory. It was his fault Wilbur died, right? If he'd just shut up and did what Wilbur told him, they would have moved on far, far away from this fucking place. His brother would be alive, and they wouldn't have had to bother Techno while he was competing in tournaments, and Phil wouldn't have to look at Ghostbur with those sad eyes, and, oh Prime, he'd ruined everything, hadn't he?

Dream was right. Dream was right, and Tommy had left, had made it worse. Dream was going to kill him, and Tommy would deserve it. He needed to turn around— Prime, what the fuck was he thinking?

A hand clamped down on Tommy's shoulder and he shuddered in relief. *Dream was here*. He could pay for his mistakes, and Dream would take him back, and all would be right in the world.

Tommy opened his eyes, expecting dark purple armor and a quartz mask. Instead, he was greeted with an unfamiliar face.

A man was standing over him, blocking Tommy's view of the sun, and he was waving his other hand in front of Tommy's face. The man's mouth was moving, and it took a few seconds for Tommy's senses to come back to him.

Whatever the man was saying was gibberish, a jumble of sounds that Tommy couldn't even begin to decipher.

"I can't understand you," Tommy mumbled. It felt like his mouth was stuffed with wool.

The man lifted his head, looking at something behind Tommy and gesturing towards himself like he was beckoning someone over. A woman replaced him, crouching a meter away from where Tommy was. Oh, he was on the ground. When did that happen?

"Can you hear me?" The woman asked. She had an unfamiliar accent, and her words were stilted.

Tommy simply nodded.

"What's your name, son?"

Alarm bells rang in Tommy's head. Did these people know Dream? Were they looking for him? He said nothing.

The woman started speaking again, but in the same gibberish the man had. Tommy's head was swimming. Was he going insane finally?

"I need you to look at me."

Tommy realized he had closed his eyes and opened them. The woman was looking at him again, her hand tilting his chin so she could look in his eyes. When had she reached out?

“I’m going to splash a—” she stopped, frowning, “a— a drink on you, okay?” The woman mimed throwing something down.

Tommy didn’t understand what she was talking about, but he nodded anyway.

He heard the sound of breaking glass and smelled a sickly sweet aroma fill the air. Tommy gagged. He’d used too many regeneration potions for the smell to ever be pleasant again. Even so, he could feel the potion taking effect, sinking into his skin and forcing his cells to stitch themselves back together.

Tommy took in a deep breath, his lungs shuddering from the effort. His fingers felt like they were on fire. He was suddenly aware of how hungry he was and how empty his stomach felt.

A piece of bread was pushed into his hands, and Tommy took a bite without thinking. *Well, if it was poisoned, it was too late.* He ate another piece, conscious of his speed this time.

“We need to move you, alright?” The woman said.

Tommy nodded and stood up. The people around him— when did they all get here?— all reached for him while making noises of surprise. Tommy could barely feel his feet through the potion’s effects, but he kept standing anyway. No way in hell was he letting any of them carry him.

The villagers seemed frozen in shock, their arms held out to catch a body that wasn’t falling.

“Just let me lean on a shoulder,” Tommy mumbled.

The woman said something he couldn't understand again, and Tommy finally recognized that it was a foreign language. How far away from the SMP was he?

The man he first saw offered Tommy his arm, and Tommy took it gladly. He wasn't a kid, but he was not about to fucking face plant in front of some strangers. The man turned him around, and Tommy got his first glance at the village he'd stumbled upon.

It was nestled right on the edge of a river separating the plains from a forest, but despite that, it had grown quite large. Tommy could spot a blacksmith's building behind a fairly large house and the tower of a church next to it. It seemed Tommy had fallen beside a farm on the edge of the village, and considering the man supporting him was covered in dirt, he'd probably seen Tommy collapse in the middle of working.

Tommy almost laughed. What a sight that must have been. A random kid covered in ash with no shoes just dropping right in front of him.

They walked further into the village, passing by a few curious faces. Tommy spotted a mother pushing her child back into a house. He didn't blame her, he probably looked like hell walking.

The man led him into the doors of the church, past the pews and into a back room with a bed and a sink. A cleric was waiting there, bustling around with his arms full of bandages and the like.

Tommy sat on the bed and let go of the man's arm. The rest of the villagers had gone somewhere else, excluding the woman who seemed to be his translator.

"What's your name?" she asked again.

Tommy shook his head.

The woman frowned. "I'm Gloria, this is Jack and Father Brown. We're just here to help."

“Why?” Tommy asked.

“Why what?”

Tommy’s head was still spinning. “Why are you helping me?”

Gloria said something in her language to the cleric before turning back to Tommy. “Why wouldn’t we? You’re an injured child, we aren’t cruel people.”

“I’m not a fucking child.”

“It’s been many years since I’ve spoken your language, but I still recognize profanity. I suggest you watch your language in the church, son.”

Tommy could almost hear Bad yelling, “Language!”

“I’ll do what I want,” Tommy said, but made a mental note to keep the cursing to a minimum.

“Father Brown wants to bandage your feet and any other injuries if you’ll let him.” The cleric must have recognized his name and stepped forward with a smile. There were a multitude of potions attached to his belt, and he already had strips of cloth cut and bundled in his hands.

Tommy shrugged. “Sure. It’s just my feet.” That was a blatant lie. Tommy could feel the burns on his chest scabbing over as they spoke, and he was surely covered in cuts and bruises on his arms and legs. But he was fine, the potion would take care of them eventually.

Father Brown kneeled in front of him and unwrapped the leaves and string on Tommy’s feet. The leaves were dead and dry by now, practically dust, and his feet were still slowly seeping

blood from the blisters. Father Brown uncorked another splash regen potion and dabbed it on his soles.

Tommy looked away and let the cleric work, more interested in the people that helped him and the place they were in.

“Was Jack the person that found me?” he asked Gloria.

She nodded. “He says you stumbled your way towards his farm for a few seconds before you collapsed. He thought you were a zombie at first, even with the sun out.”

Tommy looked down at his hands and arms. The soot covering him in a thin layer did give him a ghostly look, and his clothes were torn and battered from days of travel. He’d never mistaken a player for a zombie before though, not when the undead had glassy white eyes, rotting flesh, and exposed ribs.

“That’s pleasant,” Tommy muttered.

Gloria winced. “He means no... no—”

“Insult?”

“Yes. He means no insult, merely that he was worried you were too late to save.” She handed him back the piece of bread he’d eaten earlier. “How long have you gone without food?”

Tommy took a small bite. “I have food.”

“Certainly not enough.”

“I’m travelling. Food can be hard to come by.” Tommy flinched as the cleric started to wrap his feet in bandages.

Gloria put her hands on her hips. “You aren’t wearing shoes, and you came down from a mountain I know for a fact has animals.”

“What’s with the fucking interrogation?”

“We are trying to help you!”

Tommy shot to his feet, almost kicking the cleric. “Maybe I don’t want your help!”

Jack took that moment to reenter the room, and Tommy could have hit himself for not noticing the man leave in the first place. He was holding a pair of boots that looked to be about Tommy’s size, a backpack, and a few carrots.

Gloria looked terrified, and the cleric had pressed himself into the farthest wall of the room. Tommy was confused until he realized he’d pulled his axe out of his hotbar and was gripping it tightly.

“Shit,” he said under his breath, and switched hotbar slots. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to do that.”

Gloria took the items out of Jack’s hands and set them on the ground. “Be thankful I am a patient woman. Others will not be so kind to you. If you really want to leave, take your things and go, but do not come back when you are desperate again,” she snapped.

The villagers left the room.

Fuck.

Tommy was the biggest fucking idiot to ever exist. Dammit, why did he ever open his mouth? He knew not to talk back, Dream had drilled it into his head day one of exile. *You leave for a couple of days and think you're big man shit, again, huh?*

He grabbed the items off the floor and peeked into the backpack. It was stuffed with bandages, food, and other supplies. Tommy slipped the boots on and laced them up. He left the carrots on the sink.

No one else was in the church when he snuck out, and the other villagers still avoided him as he made his way to the other side of the village. Soon enough, he was walking on his own again.

Why had he even considered finding a village in the first place? Tommy was toxic. He knew this, and he kept forcing himself on people. He was a fucking parasite.

The best thing he could do right now was to walk as far away from the village as possible and leave everyone alone. There was a reason he was exiled, Tubbo had to keep the people safe, safe from him and his destructive habits. And if Dream wasn't here to hold Tommy to that, he'd have to do it himself.

Hitching his backpack further up on his shoulders, Tommy set a brisk pace forward. Soon, he'd be dead to the world, exactly the way he wanted it. Soon, he'd be nothing but a memory.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Comments really help me out, whether they're constructive criticism or just a simple <3, so let me know what you thought.

panic

Chapter Summary

panic - Spread hands moving in quick circles while the palms are facing away from the body.

Mining alone gave Tommy lots of time to think, and he thought he'd finally figured out why Dream was so dangerous, so terrifying. L'manburg had tried to win its independence through fighting, but they should have known it was a lost cause from the start. You couldn't win against Dream, it just wasn't possible. He was always ten steps ahead, fully kitted with items Tommy could only dream of finding. No, the only way to survive was to run and hide, escape to live another day.

Chapter Notes

Check the tags for warnings, they've been updated a bit! This chapter is slightly shorter than the others, but I'd rather have the story flow than meet a word count, so I hope you enjoy it still!

Edited: 2/10/22

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Two days later...

Tommy's arms ached from the repeated motion of digging his pickaxe into one block of stone after another. He'd been down in the newly created strip mine for hours, desperately searching for resources to make up for the things Dream had blown up.

Thankfully, he was already at full iron with a diamond pickaxe. It probably wasn't smart, but Tommy was itching to get the Nether. Without a brewing stand, he would be able to make any potions, and there was no way he would win a fight right now without the help of magic.

Mining alone gave Tommy lots of time to think, and he thought he'd finally figured out why Dream was so dangerous, so terrifying. L'manburg had tried to win its independence through

fighting, but they should have known it was a lost cause from the start. You couldn't win against Dream, it just wasn't possible. He was always ten steps ahead, fully kitted with items Tommy could only dream of finding. No, the only way to survive was to run and hide, escape to live another day.

It didn't matter if Tommy was still in his fully enchanted netherite armor back in L'manburg, he still wouldn't win. He would never win. So, he set his goals on surviving. Stockpiling potions of resistance, healing, swiftness, invisibility, and any others he could get his hands on would be crucial. Even if Dream never found him, Tommy never wanted to be in a position of weakness again. There were other people just like him in the world, waiting to pounce on those below them. People like Schlatt. People like Technobalde. People like Wilbur.

The rhythmic feeling of mining turned his arms to mush, and Tommy let it happen. He'd never felt more sore in his life, even after respawning, but if he stopped to rest he didn't think he'd ever get up.

His inventory filled with coal, iron, gold, lapis, and the occasional diamond until he couldn't fit anything more. On the walk back up to the surface, Tommy kept his hand on the items, paranoid he'd drop some along the way. He couldn't afford to lose anything.

Tommy hopped up the final step and blinked away the bright sunlight. It was almost noon, and the forest he was in was sparse, barely giving any shelter from the sun. He glanced down at his arms. Tommy never bothered to find a river close by to wash himself in, opting rather to head straight into the mines. At this point, the combination of stone dust, soot, and dirt had created a layer protecting his skin. Maybe it was for the better— at least he wouldn't get sunburnt.

He'd been purposely ignoring his hair. In exile, it started to grow out, turning into waves that almost reached past his chin. Tommy hadn't bothered to cut it, what was the point when the only person to see him was Dream? Now, it was matted to his skull, filled with little twigs, leaves, and dirt. Tommy figured he would have to cut it all off, but it was a problem for another day.

Right now, he needed to go to the Nether.

Tommy threw his iron ore in the furnace and gnawed on an apple while he waited for it to smelt. He was still living off the food the village had given him, considering he barely needed to eat much in a day. Before exile, Tommy could remember scarfing down steak and golden carrots like they were candy. Wilbur always teased him about it. *When will you be done with puberty?* he'd joke, *You're going to end up eating all our supplies in one day.*

Now, Tommy felt sick if he had more than a piece of bread and some fruit in a day. His stomach turned at the smell of meat, for some reason. Tommy remembered Mushroom Henry. He promptly wished he hadn't.

It was fine—he was fine.

Tommy grabbed four iron ingots and crafted them into a bucket and flint and steel. He made his way over to the small stream that snaked its way through the trees and scooped up the cold water. The layer of grime on his hands didn't even budge.

It was easy to find a lava pool when the trees nearby had gone ablaze and created a beacon of smoke for Tommy to follow. The lava looked shallow but wide enough to hold a portal, and that was all Tommy cared about.

He let muscle memory take over, alternating lava and water in his bucket until a frame of black obsidian stared back at him. If Tommy focused, he'd probably be able to see his reflection in the shiny rock.

Instead of dawdling, Tommy lit the portal and stepped in. The purple particles surrounded him with a familiar warmth, and he was whisked away into the Nether.

Ender, it was fucking hot. *Has it always been this suffocating?* Tommy thought. The portal spawned in a little cove of netherrack that opened up onto a large section of Nether wastes. If he squinted, Tommy thought he might be able to see a few trees in the distance.

Tommy equipped his shield and sword and started forward. He tried to remember the tips Phil had taught him. *Trade with the piglins for fire pots.* Right, that was where he needed to start. He pulled out a few gold ingots and held them in plain sight.

The landscape expanded as he walked, and sure enough, there was a warped forest on the other side of a huge lava lake. No sign of a fortress or a bastion, though.

A few curious piglins approached Tommy, and he tossed them each a gold ingot. While they were distracted, he dug out the netherrack below them and trapped them in the hole. *If only Techno were this stupid.*

They threw him trash at first, crying obsidian and some of the neon fungi that spotted the nether forests. Slowly but surely, a few more piglins joined, and Tommy had a stack of ender pearls and three fire resistance potions— one splash and two normal.

Tommy set off in the opposite direction of the warped forest. The lava lake was huge, and he couldn't see a good way to navigate it without wasting hundreds of blocks and risking his life. So, he wrapped around the mountain his portal was embedded in and kept his eyes peeled.

After a few hours of walking, Tommy was almost ready to give up. This had to be one of the worst nether spawns he'd ever seen. Either that, or the nether fortress was just outside of his vision across the lava lake.

His armor was digging into his skin, leaving red marks and blisters. It had been forever since he'd actually worn a chestplate, and there was barely any fat left on his body to cushion the hard iron. On top of that, the blisters on the bottom of his feet seemed to be reopening after walking thousands of blocks. This place really was a fucking hellscape.

"That's it, I'm turning around," Tommy declared to the few zombie piglins around him. Their dead eyes stared at him.

"Alright, fine, just a little farther." Was he fake arguing with mobs that couldn't even understand him? Prime, he was a loser.

The heat of the nether made his vision swim, like wax melting on a candle. It probably wasn't smart for him to be in here for much longer. Tommy vaguely remembered Phil telling him the story of how he met Techno, and how he'd been in the nether for days on end. Then again, he was probably wearing enchanted armor and had gapples on him. Whatever.

Someone above must have taken pity on him, because Tommy spotted the angular shape of a tower appearing out of the dark fog. *Finally*.

He trudged through a small patch of soul sand and tried to ignore the cries of the damned that followed him. Thankfully, they were never loud enough to say anything coherent. Tommy had asked Techno if his voices sounded similar, but he'd just shook his head and moved on. After the tower, Tommy thought he understood a little better.

A branch of the fortress started right at the edge of the soul sand valley, so Tommy climbed onto the bricks and started the hunt for a blaze spawner. It seemed he'd entered the wrong side, judging by the chests and hellish amounts of wither skeletons. He kept his shield up and timed his swings, avoiding any hits by the nasty mobs.

Nether fortresses were a piece of cake. Tommy had raided hundreds before, in fact, he'd be willing to bet he could do it with his eyes closed. Potions always needed restocking, and Tommy had proven himself as a much better combat partner than Wilbur even as a kid.

Soon, the ceiling opened up and the nether fortress expanded over a lava lake, and Tommy approached a dead end spawner. Perfect. There were crimson vines hanging from the walls, but he slashed through them with his sword. He placed some dirt to hide behind and waited for the blazes.

Three spawned at once, and Tommy jumped into action. Attack, block, attack, block. He'd perfected the rhythm. Tommy only managed to grab one blaze rod before the bodies disappeared, but he'd taken no damage. Slow and steady.

Another wave. Tommy swung. Another rod.

After a few minutes of stifling heat, Tommy had eight blaze rods and only a few minor burns on his arms. That'd be enough for a whole chest of potions, but Tommy just kept going. The fortress was so far away, he might as well get as many as possible.

Three blazes sparked into existence. Just as Tommy was about to rush in, he heard a low snort behind him. Before he could turn, a giant mass rammed him into the wall.

Fuck. Tommy could feel his head radiate pain where it slammed into the bricks. Instinct made him hold his shield over his body, and he felt fireballs slam into the wood.

He blinked the dizziness out of his eyes to see the hoglin rearing up for another attack. A hit from those tusks may break his shield, and Tommy needed it to protect from the blazes. *Fucking fuck.* He couldn't catch a break, huh?

Just as the hoglin moved forward, Tommy flung himself to the side. He meant to position himself closer to the exit while keeping his back away from the blazes, but he overshot his trajectory slightly.

Tommy felt himself dash over the barrier separating the tower from the open air. He could only watch as his hands failed to grab onto the edge, and then he was falling.

On instinct, Tommy's hands moved to his hotbar and grabbed the splash potion of fire resistance. He smashed the bottle on his chestplate, sending shards of glass into his hands. A second later, he hit the lava.

It felt like he hit concrete from ten stories up, but Tommy was alive, and he had a very sudden and new urge to keep it that way.

Tommy crawled upwards through the oppressive hit. The potion effect was centered around his chest, and if he stayed in the lava long enough, he'd definitely burn his hands and feet.

His head broke through the crust of dried magma above. Tommy sucked in a breath. The pressure of the lava felt like it was sucking the air out of his throat before it made it to his lungs.

Tommy could feel his brain and body separating again. His arms were moving without him thinking, carrying him to the shore. If he closed his eyes, it almost felt like someone was pulling him along. Fucking hell, how long had it been since he'd touched someone?

A sharp edge dug into his arms, and Tommy realized he was climbing onto a gravel shore. He pulled himself out, swatted the large chunks of magma off his legs, and collapsed on the ground.

He should really move. There could be more hoglins around, or angry piglins. But Tommy couldn't make himself move— whatever had been powering him through the lava was gone, and he was too trapped in his mind to do anything about it.

Ender, it felt like he still couldn't breathe. Did he damage his lungs somehow? Tommy curled in on himself, shaking. Why couldn't he move? *Oh fuck, why can't I move?*

Tommy's muscles started to tense without his control, shaking with the effort. He could hear himself hyperventilating over the sound of blood in his ears. Shit, was he poisoned or something? He hadn't eaten anything from the nether. What was happening to him?

Despite the chaos his body was undergoing, Tommy was still able to think clearly enough to panic. Prime, it was like he was trapped. What if he was trapped? Would he starve to death in the Nether, his body decaying until it came food for the hoglins?

The tightness on his chest changed— instead of an outside pressure, it felt like his heart had become a vacuum and was sucking his ribs inwards. Despite how hard he tried to expand his lungs, his body fought against him, pulling his skin and his tendons further and further towards his center.

Starting in his fingertips and toes, tingles made their way up his limbs, bringing numbness after them. It felt like mini fireworks under his skin, sparkling and exploding. He couldn't

move his fingers anymore.

Pain shot through his legs, wrapping around his calves and up through his thighs. Fucking *fuck*, that hurt. At least the pain was familiar— he'd strained his calf muscles from the tensing. Tommy tried to point his toes to extend the muscles, but he could barely move enough to make a difference. He was stuck in pain like this until he could move.

If you can move again, a little voice whispered.

“Shut the fuck up,” Tommy managed to bite out, and it filled him with a little bit of hope. It sounded a bit weird considering his cheeks had gone numb as well.

His throat hurt, rubbed raw from the intense breathing. His legs hurt. His chest hurt. Everything hurt, and Tommy just wanted to cry until he passed out. But the panic kept swirling through his veins, kept infesting his neurons, and Tommy stayed awake.

Slowly, and Prime was it slowly, Tommy's breathing slowed down, and the feeling returned to his body. The shaking turned into shivers, and he was finally able to stretch out his legs.

Tommy sat up with a groan. His fire resistance potion had long since worn off, and the tiny bits of lava still left on his skin had already burned through and left spots. How had he not felt that?

He flexed his fingers, relishing the feeling of... well, feeling again. Prime, that was weird. Had the potion been brewed wrong? Tommy had never come across a piglin that couldn't make a fire resistance potion in their sleep, and it hadn't smelled wrong when he splashed it.

Tommy got to his feet and immediately fell back down. His legs had just collapsed under him, still weak.

“You got to be fucking kidding me.”

He tried again, slowly putting pressure on his poor muscles. Prime, all Tommy wanted to do right now was sleep, and he was at least a hundred blocks from his base.

With exhaustion pulling at his eyelids, Tommy grabbed some obsidian he'd traded with the piglins earlier and formed it into a crude nether portal. Thankfully, he still had his flint and steel on him.

Tommy stumbled through the portal and almost ran head first into a tree. Now that he was in the overworld, it would probably take days to walk back to the little base he'd set up. What had he left behind? A few furnaces, a bed? Whatever. It didn't matter, because he was about to pass out here anyways.

He curled up on the ground, back to the obsidian. The heat from the portal seeped through the blocks. Prime, he was so fucking tired.

With the sun high in the sky, Tommyinnit fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy's panic attack (although he doesn't know what that is yet) is modeled exactly like my own panic attacks, so yay for mental illness accuracy in the mcYT fandom! Everyone has different attacks, so please don't think this is the blueprint for every panic attack ever, just my experiences. Anyways, thanks for all the kind comments! We just hit 200 kudos which is crazy, and I'm thankful for the support. I like to check my notifs in the morning to start my day off nice, so leave a little love <3. Thanks for reading!

death

Chapter Summary

death - Index and middle fingers extended together snap downwards.

Ender, he was bored. When had he last spoken to someone that wasn't a voice in his head? Ah, right, when he snapped at the nice village lady. When had he last spoken to someone without pissing them off? Before his exile, surely. He'd annoyed Techno, upset Jack off, and definitely angered Dream.

Tommy pressed his lips together. At least there was no one to get angry at out here, just the animals. He scuffed his feet on the ground, kicking at some branch.

Chapter Notes

The whole reason this chapter is coming out today is because I got some lovely comments that practically forced me into inspiration, so thanks to everyone that's left some love on this fic! You all help more than you know :)

Mind the Graphic Violence tag! (It's more injury here but still)

Hope you enjoy!

Edited 2/10/22

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke up with the moon. His legs felt like he'd run a marathon, and his back was stiff from leaning on hard obsidian all night.

He stood up, using the portal to support his shaky muscles. The dark cover of night hadn't quite covered the world yet, and Tommy could see the forest surrounding him in the dusk.

Well, shit.

His iron armor and shield would be enough to keep him alive through the night, but it didn't mean it would be fun. Tommy almost considered building a new base by the portal but shuddered at the thought. He'd be too easy to track.

And it'd be so easy to walk back into that lava.

Tommy hit the side of his head. "Shut the fuck up."

The voice didn't respond.

Tommy systematically worked his way through the forest, slashing through skeletons and zombies. He'd taken off his iron boots to keep his tracks light and moved in irregular paths, zig-zag-ing his way down hills and over streams.

The compass sat in his inventory, abandoned. Tommy didn't need it anymore, really. He was far enough away from L'manburg that any direction was still thousands of blocks from any he knew. He'd taken it off his neck at some point in the mines, tired of the weight. It was just a useless hunk of metal now. Tubbo didn't even have his anymore.

Tommy wondered if Dream had been telling the truth about that. He hadn't always lied. It was the truth when he said his friends didn't care anymore. It was the truth when he said the server was better off without him.

Even if Tubbo did have his compass, all it would lead him to were the ruins of Logstedshire, a lodestone leading to a graveyard. Tommy wondered if Dream had told everyone that he'd run away yet.

Tommy forced himself to think about something else. It didn't help to get stuck in the past—that's how Wilbur died, really.

Fucking hell, he was bad at this.

The stars! The stars were pretty! He stared through the canopy of leaves and gazed at the twinkling lights. Tommy used to know what some of them were called, considering Techno wouldn't shut up about all the mythology heroes they were named after. Prick.

Soon enough the stars were replaced with clouds, and Tommy had nothing left to look at except for the walk ahead of him.

Ender, he was bored. When had he last spoken to someone that wasn't a voice in his head? Ah, right, when he snapped at the nice village lady. When had he last spoken to someone without pissing them off? Before his exile, surely. He'd annoyed Techno, upset Jack off, and *definitely* angered Dream.

Tommy pressed his lips together. At least there was no one to get angry at out here, just the animals. He scuffed his feet on the ground, kicking at some branch.

Unfortunately, Tommy was realistic enough to know he'd have to live fairly close to a village. He'd like nothing more than to dig a hole in the ground and never leave, but he definitely didn't know how to live on his own. Sure, he could craft crude iron armor and kill nearby animals for food, but there was no way he'd make it without villager trades.

It took fucking *forever* to make an arrow by hand, and there was no way in hell Tommy was fighting creepers without a bow. And they'd have crops Tommy could buy so he wouldn't have to spend all his time hunting cows. Tommy really regretted not letting Techno teach him how to farm potatoes.

Besides, as much as Tommy was glad he couldn't hurt his friends anymore, he was starting to feel really lonely. Like, talk the air kind of lonely.

So, he kept his eyes peeled for another plains biome and trudged on.

Tommy never really enjoyed the silence. If people were silent, it meant they weren't having fun, and if Tommy had to make a joke at the expense of his pride to keep people happy, so be it. Unfortunately, it seemed to have backfired, and all of a sudden the whole of the SMP thought he was annoying and had him exiled. Figures.

Wilbur was the only one who really knew how smart Tommy could be.

Tommy remembered that night, how the L'manburg revolutionaries had sat around a campfire singing songs the night before battle. And when someone mentioned the horrors of war to come, Tommy was quick to bring up something else. He was pretty sure he'd gotten his arm stuck in a bowstring at some point.

Wilbur was quiet that night, never really joining into the conversation. When the others berated Tommy for his crude jokes, Wilbur's eyes focused on him across the fire. He'd pulled him aside after everyone else was asleep.

"I know what you're doing," Wilbur had said.

And Tommy had brushed him off and called him paranoid (and how ironic that was now).

But Wilbur held him by the shoulders and forced Tommy to lock eyes with him, and Tommy was forced to drop his act.

"You're smarter than anyone gives you credit for, Tommy. You'll be a fine vice president."

And then Wilbur had gone and blown everything up and died, and Tommy felt alone for the first time in years. Sure, he had Tubbo, but he was busy being president and didn't have time to mess around with Tommy anymore. So Tommy had dragged poor Ranboo into his pranks and somehow burned down George's house, and Prime, he'd never regretted anything more in his life.

Tommy didn't think Wilbur would call him smart anymore.

The sun rose, illuminating the outline of a village on the horizon, and Tommy let out a sigh he felt like he'd been holding for days.

He kept a far enough distance that no one would be able to see him unless they were looking and skirted around the village. Tommy spotted a spruce forest in the distance and headed towards it. He'd be half a days walk away from the village. Perfect.

The sun was already past its crest by the time Tommy was walking under spruce leaves. The undergrowth was full of berry bushes and downed trees, perfect for hiding a little hovel in.

Tommy's pulled his axe out of his hotbar and went to work on chopping up a tree. He was sure to gather the fallen leaves and saplings into his inventory. The fewer people that knew he was here, the better.

He placed his crafting table down and turned the logs in planks, and those into a door. Working quickly, he shifted some dirt blocks around to create a doorway reminiscent of his home in the SMP. It was the only way he knew how to build a house, really.

The door blended in with the forest floor, conveniently hilly enough to avoid any suspicion. Tommy walked around it in a circle, sure to check every angle. Unless you knew what you were looking for, most people would just walk by.

Tommy opened the door and dug out a small room behind it, big enough to fit a bed, crafting table, furnace, chest, and a few miscellaneous blocks. It was even smaller than his old home, but he was the only person that'd be seeing it.

It was an odd feeling, Tommy realized. His actions didn't hold any weight anymore. In L'manburg, it felt like everyone was watching his every move, waiting for him to make a mistake. Fucking *Dream* had followed him for hours just to find a couple of fucking music discs. Now, he could do whatever he wanted.

Tommy could burn down his own house every night and rebuild it, and no one would be the wiser. He could fill a cave with cobblestone dicks. He could grow his hair out and braid it like Technoblade. Maybe he'd wear a cape to complete the look.

He could die and no one would know.

Holy fucking hell, *he could die and no one would know*. He wouldn't die a hero's death, he'd croak in the middle of fucking no where and his body would be food for the wolves.

Tommy slammed his door shut and sat on the ground with his head in his hands.

He was nothing anymore. Nothing he did from now on would ever matter to anyone he cared about. Prime, how was he supposed to live like this?

His throat started to hurt, and Tommy realized he was hyperventilating again. What the fuck was wrong with him now?

Tommy felt like he was floating, and he desperately pulled at his hair to try and ground himself. His hands started to go numb, and oh Prime, it was all happening too fast— Prime fucking *dammit* why couldn't he breathe?

There were no torches in his dirt hole, so Tommy was left to stare into the dark void while he felt himself detach from his body for the second time that day.

He was shaking like a leaf, but Tommy couldn't bring himself to stop it, much less care. Honestly, if he passed out in the dirt, he might consider it a blessing. He was hollow, scooped out and tossed out at Dream's feet for him to play with, and there was nothing left for Tommy.

Tommy opened his mouth to scream, but nothing came out. Instead, his hands migrated to his arms and dirty fingernails dug into his skin. He couldn't even feel what he was doing.

His brain conjured up an image of his nails digging deep enough into his arms so that blood started seeping out and fuck, he could feel his muscles under his fingers. Prime, *fuck*, Tommy couldn't feel his hands, he could be killing himself. He could be killing himself. *He could be killing himself.*

His mind latched on, dreaming up scenarios of blood draining out of his nose, his head slammed into obsidian hard enough so Tommy could see his skull, his skin covered in weeping burns, stumps where legs used to be, his skin peeling strip by strip.

Tommy gagged, dry heaving onto the ground, but there was nothing in his stomach to come up. He didn't know whether to be thankful or not.

He flexed his fingers, able to feel them again, and released their tight hold on his arms. Tommy held his breath as he rubbed them together, searching for the familiar feeling of blood on skin.

Nothing. He wasn't dying.

His breath shuddered and Tommy was crying, sobbing into his arms. He wanted a hug. He wanted someone to wrap their arm around his shoulder and tell him he was okay, but the only person he could feel was himself.

It was his fault, really. It wasn't healthy to keep bottling up his emotions, and Tommy knew there would come a day that he'd break down, but he was really hoping it would have been with someone by his side.

Eventually, Tommy was able to grab a torch from his inventory and place it in front of him. He glanced at his arms. There were red half-moons on his forearms, but they didn't seem to be bleeding. Tommy figured they'd fade in a day or so. It didn't feel right—he'd thought he was dying, and really, he had nothing to show for it.

He stood up and opened the door. Night had already fallen, so Tommy grabbed his drafting table and headed back inside. He placed it down alongside a furnace and chest. Home. Luckily, he had enough wool from killing sheep to craft a simple bed.

He'd have to figure out what was wrong with him eventually, Tommy figured. Normal people didn't act like he did. But for now, all he wanted to do was forget about it. It could be a problem for tomorrow Tommy, and wasn't that the same mindset that got him into all this in the first place.

Dream was right. He would never change. Tommy was stuck like he was, broken and annoying, and entirely alone.

Suddenly, Tommy couldn't sleep. He had been exhausted seconds ago, but his leg wouldn't stop twitching and his mind was wide awake. Sighing, he sat up and merely set his spawn point.

He scanned his inventory for something to do and spotted the blaze rods that had given him so many problems. May as well make a brewing stand now.

Tommy funnelled the rest of his items into the chest, useless things like flowers and sand. He could almost hear Tubbo argue with him. *They're not useless, Tommy*, he'd say, *you need flowers for bees!* Ghostbur had said Tubbo was building an apiary in L'manburg. Tommy shoved the flowers to the bottom.

He sat in front of the crafting table and grabbed three cobblestone and one of the rods. Tommy snorted, remembering the hours he spent stealing brewing stands and potions from people for the drug van. Prime, he'd been just a stupid little kid following around Wilbur like a lost puppy.

The recipe was easy now, ingrained in Tommy's head forever. In minutes, he'd embedded the rod in the cobble so it stood straight up, and he wrapped iron around the top to hold the bottles.

Tommy grabbed some stone and grinded another rod into some blaze power, and he fed it into the brewing stand. It gurgled to life, glowing just slightly to the trained eye.

He didn't have ghastr tears for regen, and he certainly didn't have golden carrots for invisibility, so Tommy would have to make due with swiftness and strength. Prime knew he had a few blaze rods to use for powder.

Tommy grabbed some sugar cane out of his chest that he'd grabbed at some point in his trip and turned it into sugar. He was about to put it into the brewing stand before he realized he'd forgotten the water bottles. Fucking hell, he needed to smelt some sand. So much for useless, huh?

He shoved some blocks into the furnace and waited for it to turn to glass that he crafted into bottles. Tommy grabbed a few and headed out into the night. He was probably being a little reckless, considering all his weapons were close range, but Tommy didn't think he could stay still right now.

Thankfully, there was a stream fairly close to his house that he could quickly fill the bottles with. A zombie or two wandered their way over, but Tommy took care of them easily with his iron sword.

Back inside his house, Tommy attached the water bottles to the brewing stand and put a nether wart in the rod. He never quite understood this step, considering the potions looked exactly the same afterwards, but Wilbur swore by it. He even called them "awkward potions" like the nerd he was.

After the nether wart was fully diluted, Tommy put in the sugar. It trickled into the bottles like sand in an hourglass but dissolved in the water to create a light blue tint. He grabbed the potions and pocketed them.

Tommy grinded some more blaze powder and fed it into the stand, this time as an ingredient instead of power. The potions turned the iconic blood red shade of strength potions, and Tommy put those in his inventory as well.

He'd head into the village eventually and trade for some carrots. Converting them into their golden counterparts was costly, especially since Tommy had all of three gold ingots, but invisibility would be one of the few ways he could escape Dream. The green bitch would have to be a madman to have followed Tommy all the way out here, but Tommy would bet his discs that Dream wasn't really sane anymore.

There'd been days when Tommy first arrived where he considered Dream his friend. He'd even sided with him on a few conflicts. Tommy could never understand what made Dream do what he did— what *really* motivated him.

Dream had even kicked him out when he first showed up, but Tommy kept walking back, inventory empty but a wide smile on his face, and Dream let him back in. Prime, Tommy wished he had just left. He'd ignored all the signs and walked straight into the lion's den like a fucking idiot.

With the potions in his inventory, Tommy only had a few spots open. He frowned, scanning his items for anything he didn't need. His eyes caught on the compass.

Tommy grabbed it and placed it on his palm. The needle spun till it faced the lodestone in L'manburg. Ghostbur never told him where in the city it was, but Tommy liked to imagine it was somewhere nice, like Tubbo's apiary or Party Island.

It was useless, really. Tommy knew the coordinates of L'manburg, if he ever wanted to return, but he wasn't really planning on it. It wasn't like Dream would let him. Tommy ran a finger over the engraving. *Your Tubbo*.

Tommy shoved the compass into his chest. It was just taking up a slot. He sorted through the rest of his inventory, throwing some unsmelted ores into the furnace and turning logs into planks.

It felt like he was a kid again, all of his earthly possessions crammed into thirty-six squares. Tommy didn't remember much from when he was younger— Wilbur told him he was lucky — but his muscles remembered the survival skills. It was probably the only reason he was alive at this point.

When Ghostbur came back and Tommy learned about his memory loss, he didn't quite understand why Ghostbur remembered some things and forgot others. According to the ghost, he remembered his death, something Tommy wouldn't consider happy by any stretch of the imagination, but he had no recollection of meeting Tommy.

That Tommy was naive. He thought memories were made and hung up like photos on the wall, covered by a pane of glass—to be observed but not changed. He had few bad memories, Eret's betrayal, the loss of his discs, Wilbur's death, but they were dwarfed by the good. Everything could be rebuilt, he learned. So how was it that Ghostbur had forgotten so much?

And then Tommy was exiled, and his good memories were shattered and tainted by the actions of the future. He couldn't think about pretty sunsets by the bench without remembering Tubbo's cruel face as he ordered Tommy out of L'manburg. Tommy couldn't remember Jschlatt as his childhood friend without hearing his slurred commands. Tommy couldn't recall meeting Wilbur without seeing TNT in his hands.

If Tommy died (and he did not want to think about that) and came back as a ghost, he didn't think he'd remember much of anything.

Tommy stumbled over to his bed, the sudden burst of energy that kept him up finally gone. He could see the start of a sunrise peeking under his door, but he didn't let that stop him from closing his eyes and drifting off.

Chapter End Notes

If you skipped the graphic scene, it was just a paragraph of Tommy imagining himself horribly injured. Nothing actually happens!

I don't think I've ever planned out a fic this much, I've got a whole timeline with documented time skips and everything. I even made a table of contents; I feel so fancy :) . Anyways, I hope you all liked this chapter, I'm still debating on how far to skip ahead for the next chapter. Would you all like a larger skip with the plot a bit more condensed, or more chapters with a bit of a slower plot? Let me know!

thank you

Chapter Summary

thank you - The fingers of one hand touch the chin and move away from the body.

Tommy groaned, rolling over in his bed and stuffing his face in his arms. He'd added a window once he realized he'd sleep through the day without the sun to wake him up. It was weird- even in Pogtopia, Tommy always woke at the crack of dawn. Techno complained about it all the time, but Tommy always felt like he had too much energy to stay asleep for long. Now, he was almost afraid he'd go to bed one night and simply never wake up.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for taking so long to update! Between midterms and the canon content we've gotten lately, I didn't have a lot of time to write. That should change now that I'm on spring break! Thanks for sticking with me on this, and I hope you like the chapter :)

Edited 2/10/22

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Fifteen days later...

Tommy was running out of supplies. He'd killed most of the animals near his house, his shoes were almost scrap already, and he still didn't have arrows for his bow.

He'd been avoiding the village for as long as possible, but he was going to have to suck it up and go anyway.

Tommy groaned, rolling over in his bed and stuffing his face in his arms. He'd added a window once he realized he'd sleep through the day without the sun to wake him up. It was weird— even in Pogtopia, Tommy always woke at the crack of dawn. Techno complained

about it all the time, but Tommy always felt like he had too much energy to stay asleep for long. Now, he was almost afraid he'd go to bed one night and simply never wake up.

After a few minutes of drifting between consciousness and unconsciousness, Tommy admitted defeat and got out of bed. His little dirt hole hadn't changed much over the past few days, just the addition of a staircase into his strip mine. He'd gone through iron pickaxe after iron pickaxe until he had enough diamonds for a full set of armor and weapons. Tommy didn't think he'd be able to relax fully until he had netherite, but he wasn't planning on going back to the Nether for a long time.

Tommy kept the diamond armor in his inventory and just wore an old iron chestplate. He didn't want to scare the villagers off, but there was no way he was going in without protection. If he was lucky, the chestplate would stop a first attack, and Tommy would have time to suit up.

He meticulously checked his supplies. All the potions were in his inventory, one of each type in his hotbar. He had an open space for his hand to look less intimidating, but the others were filled with a shield and weaponry. Tommy had enough food for the journey three times over, just in case he needed to take a detour before returning home.

Tommy still didn't feel safe, but he couldn't change that in the next day, and he really needed to head to the village now.

The door shut behind him, and Tommy started the trek through the spruce forest. He'd gotten used to the silence more and more. Now, he could appreciate the tiny cracks of twigs made by rabbits on the forest floor, and the rustle of pine needles when the wind hit them just right. From what Tommy could remember, he'd always lived near people and buildings.

It was hard for Tommy to recall what life used to be like before he met Wilbur. Tommy knew he'd had parents at some point, but life had happened and Tommy grew up wandering the streets of random cities on public servers. Wilbur had shown up, played a song on his guitar, and disappeared. It would take months for Tommy to run into him again, but they just kept meeting each other, like two planets on an orbit heading for collision.

Life was a whirlwind after Wilbur. He never could stay still, always jumping from one project to the next. Tommy followed him across worlds, quickly growing up as he coasted on

Wilbur's waves.

Wilbur was not made for quiet forests and empty plains. He shone in front of a crowd, whether he was singing or speaking. Wilbur was made for cities, for *ruling* those cities, and because Tommy would follow Wilbur anywhere, Tommy thought he was made for that too.

But Tommy found he enjoyed the silence much more than he used to.

His walk through the spruce forest was pleasant, the sunlight dappling the brown pine needles on the ground. They were perfect for masking footsteps, and Tommy found he could navigate the area around his home almost silently. The animals didn't run when he passed by.

Soon enough, the forest turned into an open space, and Tommy approached the village. It was smaller than most he encountered on his travels, and as soon as he was close enough, the villagers nearby stopped their work and stared at him. Tommy tried to ignore them.

He headed to the blacksmith's, eyes straight ahead. The forge was quiet, but a villager stood inside, cleaning some sort of machinery. When they heard Tommy enter, they straightened up and put a smile on their face.

"Can I help you?" The blacksmith's eyes roamed over Tommy's figure. Their accent was almost indecipherable, but Tommy was just glad they spoke the same language.

Tommy opened his mouth to reply, but nothing came out. It had been days since he last spoke, and his throat didn't seem to be cooperating with him. He slapped his chest and coughed.

"Bit of a sore throat?" The blacksmith asked.

Tommy nodded, not able to explain why his voice had simply given up on him.

“Well that’s alright. I assume you’re here to trade? We don’t get too many travellers, so my stock is limited, but just find what you want.” They gestured to the stock on shelves around them.

Tommy pulled out his iron and coal instead and held them out.

“Ah, I see!” The blacksmith inspected Tommy’s offerings. “I can give you, let’s say, seven emeralds for those.”

Bullshit, Tommy thought. He raised an eyebrow and pointed upwards.

“I can easily go and get some coal myself, son, the most this is worth is nine emeralds.”

Tommy nodded and gestured for the villager to take the goods. He did so, grumbling as he pulled out his emeralds and counted out nine.

The villager handed him the gems. “Are you planning to stay for long?”

Tommy tensed, caught himself, and shrugged. The blacksmith didn’t seem to notice his discomfort, merely humming and inspecting the iron ingots.

“Well, come back if you have anything more.”

Tommy left the forge a richer man, ready to blow it all in minutes. He was actually smart with his money, but he’d been going way too long without proper supplies and was desperate for some sense of normalcy.

The villagers still glanced at him as he walked by, but they seemed to have accepted his presence. Tommy wondered how accurate the blacksmith’s comment about travellers was. To him, it seemed like they didn’t get *anyone* to visit.

The leatherworker was at his cauldrons when Tommy stopped by. He pointed at a pair of shoes in the window and the villager simply held out his hand and said, “Three emeralds.” A minute later, Tommy had new shoes and was on the move again.

The fletcher was the exact opposite. Tommy entered her shop which seemed to double as her home, and she immediately greeted him with a smile and, “Welcome!”

Tommy tried to smile back, but it felt more like a grimace. He pointed to the bundles of arrows behind her and showed an emerald.

“Oh poor thing, can you not talk?”

Tommy did not like the fletcher. He really, *really* wanted to flip her off, but he needed those arrows. So, instead, he dropped his smile, shook his head, and pointed at the arrows again.

The fletcher grabbed a bundle. “Is this what you want, sweetheart?”

No, idiot, I’ve just been pointing at a fucking wall for no reason.

Tommy nodded and gestured to his emerald.

“For you? I couldn’t charge you, you look like a breeze could blow you over! Are your parents feeding you enough?”

It was becoming harder and harder for Tommy to keep his anger in check, but the allure of free arrows kept him calm on the surface. He shrugged and hunched over slightly, playing up the part of “starving child” that the fletcher seemed so desperate to help.

“Oh darling, you get those to your dad and tell your mom to make you a rich dinner tonight.”
The fletcher passed him the arrows.

For a woman herself, she seemed pretty fucking sexist. Tommy knew for a fact that Phil made better soup than anyone else he knew, and Drista scared him shitless more than Dream did.

Tommy headed out of the shop, one last stop left. He had spotted a couple of farms on his way in, but half of them were probably growing something shitty like beetroots or potatoes. He was a growing man, and growing men needed something better than shitty vegetables.

He approached a farm filled with wheat stalks and stomped his foot on the ground to get the farmer’s attention. Tommy waved around an emerald and pointed at the crops.

“Uh, hello?”

Tommy rolled his eyes, gave a curt wave, and then repeated his previous actions.

“Are you alright, son?”

Ender, some people were fucking stupid. Tommy grabbed a bundle of harvested wheat by the farmer’s feet and shoved the emerald in his hand. He probably could have bartered for two bundles, but his stupid fucking voice wasn’t working, and the villager was practically *radiating* idiocy.

The farmer called something as Tommy walked away, but he toned it out. Whatever it was, it wasn’t worth his time.

Tommy was too busy fuming about his situation that he practically tripped over the next villager. They were crouched over the ground, hands deep in dirt, and Tommy had been focusing on the horizon. He practically kneed the guy in the face before falling on his ass. Fucking *great*.

“Shoot, dude, are you alright?” Oh Ender, the guy’s accent was exactly like Dream’s, vaguely American, but missing the comfort of Techno’s dropped ‘g’s and ‘bruh’s. Tommy froze, sprawled out on the ground with his arms keeping him up.

The farmer rubbed his head where Tommy hit him. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” Tommy opened his mouth, and for the second time that day, nothing came out.

Good, that sick little voice whispered, *then you can’t push them away*.

Tommy was going to be sick. He was going to throw up all over this poor farmer who didn’t ask to be caught up in Tommy’s shit, and they were gonna think he was crazy, and—

“Genuinely, are you okay? You’ve gone all pale?” The villager’s voice drew Tommy out of his spiral, but he still hated how a small part of him wished it was Tubbo he was speaking to. He wished Tubbo was asking him if he was okay.

Tommy slowly nodded and pulled himself to his feet. The villager kept his eyes locked on Tommy’s concern written all over his gaze.

Surprisingly, the farmer didn’t look much older than himself. He couldn’t be any older than twenty. For a second, Tommy wondered why he was farming alone, but then he remembered he was sixteen and definitely in a much weirder position than this random farmer. He looked away from the guy’s concerned face.

They were standing in the middle of a carrot farm, and wasn’t that just Tommy’s luck, he needed to trade with this guy.

Tommy picked up a handful of carrots and pulled another emerald out of his hotbar. The farmer seemed to understand his intentions, and for whatever reason, didn’t respond with words. Instead, he grabbed a few more carrots and piled them in Tommy’s arms before taking the emerald. He pointed to the harvest around them and held up two fingers.

Ah, he's asking if I want more, Tommy realized. He probably had over twenty carrots, plenty for a couple of invisibility potions, but golden carrots were a great source of food, and he had some emeralds to spare. Tommy nodded.

The farmer scooped up some more carrots and put them into a burlap bag he'd had tied to his belt. Then, he held out the bag so Tommy could shove the rest of the carrots inside. Tommy handed him an emerald for the bag.

The whole interaction had unbalanced Tommy more than falling had. He felt even more confused when the farmer touched his fingers to his chin and then moved them away. He accompanied it with a grin, friendly and open. The gesture looked like second-nature to the villager, and Tommy wondered if it was a regional way of saying goodbye, even if the other villagers hadn't done so.

Tommy replicated the hand movement, hoped it was acceptable, and moved on. As he left, he glanced back, but the farmer had already resumed his task.

He let his body take over to trade for watermelon, allowing his brain to wander. It probably wasn't healthy, this odd separation of physical and mental, but Tommy couldn't really help it.

He'd done everything he needed today without speaking. He'd even had a positive interaction with that carrot farmer, even if he didn't quite understand why. Tommy didn't need to talk. In fact, he was probably better off staying silent. The people around him smiled—he hadn't driven them away.

Tommy thought back to the woman in the church at that last village. She wouldn't have hated him if he hadn't said anything. Maybe he would have stayed there. He could have avoided that Prime awful visit to the Nether.

It was better this way.

Tommy thanked whatever kept his mouth shut that day and wished it had done so years ago. What other things could he have avoided by not speaking? What things were his fault because he just couldn't stop talking?

His feet had already started moving him back towards the base by the time he returned to his senses. Inventory full of supplies, Tommy felt a sliver of hope for the future. Maybe, just maybe, he could do this.

The forest was just as quiet as normal, but Tommy relished the tiny sounds he could catch. He glanced up at the sky, noting the sun was hours away from setting. Spontaneously, Tommy dug his feet into the trunk of a tree and started to climb.

Sap stuck to his palms and bark scraped his shins to shit, but Tommy lifted himself onto a large branch that hung at least six meters over the ground. He could see the tops of some of the shorter trees, and it was easier to scope out the forest from this height. But instead of focusing on that, Tommy closed his eyes and leaned back onto the tree's trunk.

The air seemed clearer up here, almost thinner, and the miniscule sounds of nature rang in Tommy's ears like bells. A fox scampered across the ground, and Tommy could almost see it in his mind's eye. Little paws with footsteps muffled by the underbrush, and reddish fur that painfully reminded him of Fundy. It ran underneath Tommy's tree, unaware of the person listening above. Weirdly enough, that made Tommy feel proud.

He focused his senses farther outwards. The stream that ran by Tommy's base gurgled as it ran over rocks and fallen branches. The hundreds of animals that lived in this forest probably drank from its cold stream.

Tommy dug his hands into the tree branch and imagined the roots that must have spread out farther underground than the tree itself. Did they also grow in search for water, or was the rain enough?

He must have spent almost an hour in the tree listening to the sounds around him. Tommy, not once in his life, had taken the time to stop and reflect like this. Life was better lived in the fast lane. If every inch of time wasn't full of excitement and chaos, it was wasted, or at least that's what he used to think. Now, Tommy felt exhausted just thinking about it.

Had he really enjoyed living like that, or was he just worried everything would catch up to him if he stopped moving?

Tommy slipped out of the tree, managing to cut up his hands on the way down, but he couldn't find it in himself to care. He felt great, almost numb to what was happening around him. Weeks and weeks of pain, and Tommy was finally feeling better.

The little hole in the ground that Tommy called home was just as he left it. He emptied his supplies into his chest and tucked the emeralds deep in the bottom in case someone tried to rob him.

The sun was setting by the time Tommy finished, so he collapsed on his bed, drained but calmer than he'd been in recent memory. He let the numbness take over, hollow the pain out of him, and Tommy smiled.

Chapter End Notes

Tommy: haha, I don't feel sad anymore, I must be getting better!

Me: *insert john cena meme* ArE yOu SuRe AbOuT tHaT?

In all seriousness, I know how deceptive the ups and downs of mental health can be, but Tommy doesn't yet!

Anyways, if you all wanna listen to what I have been to write this, check out Will Wood / Will Wood and the Tapeworms, especially Cotard's Solution. I've been listening to their stuff on repeat for a week now, and I think I've properly fixated on it.

I'm considering writing for Ranboo's fic contest (once I come up with an idea) so I might delay and update for this story to do that, but I'll post it here on Ao3 for y'all to read. Thanks for the support, and I'll see you soon <3

you're welcome

Chapter Summary

you're welcome - Palms facing upwards with the fingers flicking towards the body.

Tommy had no logical reason to leave his house, but his brain felt like mush and he really, really wanted to see a face other than his. His feet were dragging him outside before he even made up his mind.

Tommy had been outside plenty of times in the past few days, but it was never out of the sight of his house, and it was always to sit and listen. Meditating, his brain supplied, but Tommy felt like a right prick calling it that. He wasn't actually doing anything.

But he had ventured outside enough that the allure of nature had started to lose its shiny new sheen. It was still relaxing, sure, but Tommy had a weird ache for something more, and so he headed off to the village.

Chapter Notes

Me: It's spring break, I'll be able to write and update a ton!

My computer: Or, hear me out, how about we break and prevent you from getting any work done?

Really though, I'm sorry about how long this took. My laptop is fixed now, though, so I should be back to normally paced updates. Thanks for all the comments though, I checked them on my phone and they kept me from going crazy while I couldn't write.

Enjoy!

Edited 2/10/22

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nineteen days later...

Tommy really didn't need to visit the village. He was fine on supplies— in fact, he'd barely used anything he got from the trades. He'd converted the golden carrots into invisibility potions as soon as possible, of course, but he hadn't gone exploring enough to even use a single arrow. Why would he need to when he was fine inside his house?

Sure, it was boring, but everywhere was boring with no one to talk to. Not that Tommy wanted to talk.

On top of that, his appetite had taken a dive in the past week. Tommy figured it was because he wasn't moving around as much, but he had a nagging feeling it was something else. Surely he needed more than one slice of bread and a carrot to eat in a day, right?

So, Tommy had no logical reason to leave his house, but his brain felt like mush and he really, *really* wanted to see a face other than his. His feet were dragging him outside before he even made up his mind.

Tommy had been outside plenty of times in the past few days, but it was never out of the sight of his house, and it was always to sit and listen. *Meditating*, his brain supplied, but Tommy felt like a right prick calling it that. He wasn't actually doing anything.

But he had ventured outside enough that the allure of nature had started to lose its shiny new sheen. It was still relaxing, sure, but Tommy had a weird ache for something more, and so he headed off to the village.

He realized halfway there he'd forgotten to bring his emeralds or anything trade, like a fucking idiot. Tommy almost turned around and called the day a loss, but his body didn't listen and kept walking.

It was early enough in the morning that most of the villagers were still inside, excluding the ever-working farmers. Tommy's back ached just looking at them.

He hadn't been sleeping much recently, Tommy noticed. Even if he was bone tired, he would wake just a few hours later. No dreams, no nightmares, no nothing. Just an ever-growing feeling of exhaustion that settled into his brain too easily.

Tommy was quiet enough that the nearest villager didn't notice him until he was right on the edge of their farm. They straightened up and waved; Tommy noticed they were the watermelon farmer he barely remembered talking to.

“Good to see you again! Here to trade?”

Tommy shook his head.

“Well, the inn might be open if you need a room or something.” With that, the farmer got back to work. Tommy figured it could have gone worse.

He left that farm and wandered through the streets. No one was outside to stare at him, so he took his time to map out the buildings and streets. Most were houses, or shops with living areas above them. Tommy wondered how far away they were from any sort of large city.

The town centre wasn't much to see, just a fountain and a bell. The ground was well worn into a dusty circle. Tommy could almost picture the village kids playing ring-around-the-rose while their parents yelled at them to stop running.

It was the only time Tommy got to play with other kids his age, when they gathered in large groups he could blend into. As long as he kept his mouth shut and scattered when the adults came around, Tommy could almost pretend he was normal.

Tubbo was Tommy's first friend his age. Sure, he loved Wilbur, and he was eternally grateful that Wilbur had let him tag along on his adventures, but Tubbo held a special place in his heart. Or used to, at least. Wilbur would scoff and say he was too old when Tommy asked to play tag. Tubbo would laugh and run down the Prime Path.

Tommy didn't think he would make a good friend for kids his age anymore. Everyone thought it was funny when he said he wasn't a child, but it really was the truth, wasn't it? Child soldiers were still soldiers. Tommy doubted he could play tag without having a fucking fit and stabbing someone.

“Hey, good to see you again!” Tommy flinched, unaware that someone had approached. He turned away from the fountain and broke out of his daydream. The carrot farmer from earlier stood a few meters away, two baskets balanced on his hips.

Tommy waved. He hoped there wasn't a gesture to say hello that the man was expecting.

“I didn't think I'd see you back here, but I'm glad you are. Back for more trades?”

He shook his head. Why was the farmer happy to see him?

“What are you up to, then?”

He gave a little shrug.

The farmer laughed and readjusted his hold on the baskets. “Just wandering around? You can tag along while I drop off these at my house if you'd like.”

Tommy almost shook his head before even thinking. There was no one around to help if the farmer attacked, and even if there was, there was no guarantee they'd help. However, he was much shorter than Tommy, and he couldn't spot any weapons on him.

Besides, he couldn't even talk. Why would the villager even want him around?

“It's just a suggestion, no pressure, but I could use some company.” The farmer smiled, and it looked genuine, but Tommy had never been good at reading people.

He really wanted to say no, but the man looked nice, and he did seem a bit lonely, and Tommy was really tired of upsetting people. He nodded.

“Great! If you don’t mind holding a basket, I can at least use one of my hands,” the farmer said. Tommy didn’t mind, so he took a basket and followed the man through the streets.

“What's your name?” As the man spoke, he moved his right hand in a series of odd shapes that Tommy couldn’t wrap his head around. “I can’t sign much, sorry, but if you don’t want me to talk, I can try.”

Tommy had no idea what this guy was on about. He raised an eyebrow almost comically.

“Uh, you’re looking at me like I’m crazy. Are you confused about something?”

Tommy nodded and pointed at the farmer’s hand.

“My hand? Oh, are you confused about the signing?”

Tommy didn’t know why he was calling it that. In the SMP, the only “signing” he could think of were the wooden signs people would leave as messages. He nodded, figuring the signing was the weird gestures.

The villager stopped in the middle of the path. “Do you not know sign language?”

Obviously not . Tommy shook his head.

“I’m sorry, mate, I thought you did. You aren’t deaf, right?”

Tommy shook his head again. The villager paused, and Tommy could almost hear the question on his tongue. *Why can’t you speak? Are you sick? What’s wrong with you?*

“Do you want to learn?”

What?

Tommy’s confusion must have shown on his face, because the villager quickly clarified, “I can teach you how to speak with your hands.”

His first instinct was to say no because Tommy was certain he would fuck up talking with his hands just as badly as he did normally. But, if he was being too annoying, they could just look away, right? And as long as Tommy didn’t learn how to swear, he probably wouldn’t piss anyone off.

Tommy shrugged, an internal yes, but he tried to avoid looking too eager.

“My name is Sean, by the way.” While he spoke, he moved his hands in four defined shapes that Tommy guessed were the letters to his name. “If you know the alphabet, you can say anything, but it takes a while, so you should probably know some basics first.”

Tommy nodded, because what else could he do except follow along? Sean didn’t seem like a bad guy, which Tommy knew could be deceptive, but he wasn’t doing anything. Tommy hadn’t even told him his name.

They stopped in front of a house, and Sean dropped the basket by the steps. Tommy did the same, and when Sean set off in another direction, Tommy followed.

“Well, you already know hello and goodbye,” Sean gave him a little wave, “I said thank you yesterday.”

Tommy remembered the motion he’d made, fingers to chin with his hand moving forward.

“You responded with thank you too, which is fine,” although Sean said it in a way that Tommy knew it was a bit weird. He raised an eyebrow, daring to look Sean in the eyes.

Sean snorted lightly. “Fine, it was a bit odd, but I got what you meant. If you want to properly say you’re welcome, you do this.”

He held both of his hands out, palms facing his chest, and flicked his curled fingers back and forth. Tommy thought it looked like he was asking for someone to fight him, but he mimicked the motion anyway, and Sean smiled.

“Exactly! The hardest thing about sign language is just remembering everything, the signs themselves aren’t difficult to do.”

Tommy repeated the ‘thank you’ sign from the other day.

Sean laughed a little. “Almost, it’s from your chin, not your nose.”

Tommy rolled his eyes and fixed the sign. He understood him anyways, it wasn’t *that* big of a deal.

They approached Sean’s field of carrots, just a few feet away from where Tommy tripped over him. Most of the other nearby farmers were hard at work, and Tommy felt a bit guilty that he’d taken up Sean’s time.

“I can pay you a few emeralds if you help me with the carrots,” Sean offered, moving his hands along with his speech. He paused once or twice, and his hands stuttered on a few motions, but Tommy appreciated the thought anyways. “It’s peak harvest for the next couple of days, and it would be much easier with a second set of hands.”

Tommy could tell that half of the field was already harvested— Sean was probably just pitying him.

You refused pity in Logstedshire, and look where that got you.

Tommy scowled. He had a right to be mad at them, Techno had visited just to make fun of him, and then no one had even shown up to his party.

Dream would call you ungrateful.

Sean was still focused on Tommy, waiting for an answer, and the longer Tommy went without moving, he could feel the farmer's concern growing. Tommy moved on autopilot, tapping his head and shaking it. "I don't know how," he tried to say.

Sean took a second to decipher Tommy's gesture, smiling once it clicked. "I can teach you. It's quite easy, actually, just a lot of labor. And 'I don't know' is done like his—" Sean tapped his hands on his temples and moved them away.

Tommy wanted to refuse, but he had no excuse. He didn't understand why Sean would take the time to teach him both sign language and farming, but he couldn't seem to relax. It was too good to be true.

He will hate you.

Thankfully, Sean seemed to notice some of Tommy's discomfort and gave him a shallow smile. "It's alright if you don't want to, no pressure, and I'm sure you have things to do."

Tommy wasn't dumb. He knew Sean was giving him an out, and Prime, was he grateful for it. He nodded, signed thank you, and stepped away from the farm.

Sean gave him a wave and turned towards his carrots, and Tommy was alone again. He let out a silent breath and walked out of the village, his steps light and his ears tuned to avoid

anyone else. Tommy had talked to Sean for all of a half hour, and he felt exhausted. Prime, he hadn't even opened his fucking mouth and he still felt like he'd said the wrong thing.

Tommy's hands moved of their own accord while he walked home, cycling through the signs he'd learned. *Thank you, you're welcome, I don't know, thank you, you're welcome, I don't know.*

Ghostbur had a library back in L'manburg, and the one time Tommy had been to his childhood home, Wilbur's room was stuffed full of books. Half of them Tommy couldn't even read, considering they were written in languages he'd never even heard of. Wilbur would laugh and slip into an accent, teasing Tommy with words he'd never translate. Tommy wondered if he knew sign language, or if no one bothered to write books about languages you couldn't even speak.

Tommy missed the way Wilbur would talk, his words ten steps ahead of you and so carefully crafted that you didn't even realize it. It was a wonder to watch when Wilbur was on your side, but Tommy remembered how those words hurt when directed towards him. He still missed it.

They'd been walking down the Prime Path together one day, before Schlatt had won the election, and Tubbo had wished Wilbur a happy birthday. Tommy almost tripped over himself, but Wilbur thanked him with a smile and moved on.

"It's September, why does Tubbo think it's your birthday?"

Wilbur shrugged. "I told him it was today."

"What?"

"I told Tubbo my birthday was September 14."

Tommy felt like he was missing something. "Why did you do that?"

“Why not?”

And Tommy didn't know what to say to that.

It was Wilbur's birthday first, and then Tommy learned he lied about other things, stories he'd tell to others with little lies woven in. He told Jack he was kicked out of a neighboring village, even though Tommy had been with him at the time and they left without incident. He told everyone that Fundy's mom was a salmon, and even Tommy didn't know if that was true or not.

In Pogtopia, Tommy started to doubt how much he ever really knew about Wilbur Soot. They'd know each other for a few years, and Tommy considered him his best friend, but would Wilbur say the same?

And then Wilbur went and fucking blew up the country they'd all given a life for, and Tommy decided he never knew what went on in Wilbur's head and never would.

Someone's got trust issues, the little voice whispered, and Tommy felt like punching a tree. He wished his thoughts were an actual person so he could yell at them and call them a bitch, but Tommy couldn't even fucking talk anymore.

He slammed his door once he got home, pacing the few meters of dirt floor. Fuck, he needed something to keep his hands busy.

Tommy pulled everything out of his chests, letting the items that didn't fit in his inventory sit on the floor. He organized things into little piles, making sure every single item passed through his hands before he was ready to put them back.

His chests were full again, but Tommy couldn't keep his feet from tapping inside his shoes, so he jumped to his feet and strolled outside. He pulled out his axe and swung it at the nearest tree trunk. Tommy already had plenty of logs after spending days alone in the forest, but he kept *thinking*, dammit, and the dull thud of iron on wood kept him from falling in too deep.

Tommy slipped his axe back into his inventory, the tree still standing with a few slices in its trunk. It wasn't working, his brain was still running faster than Tommy could keep up, and *Prime* why couldn't he just fucking calm down?

He was already walking back to the village before he processed whether it was a good idea or not. Sure, Sean might think he was crazy and tell him to leave but picking carrots sounded pretty good to Tommy right now.

Sean was still in his field when Tommy got there, hands deep in the earth and a basket half full of carrots. Tommy clapped his hands, and Sean's head shot up. He looked surprised at first, but his expression relaxed and Sean stood up to greet Tommy.

"Hey! Changed your mind?"

Tommy nodded, and signed thank you for good measure, not quite able to express what he wanted to say.

Sean waved him off. "Don't worry about it. I already watered the field, so the carrots are nice and loose for pickin'". He tossed Tommy a weird looking tool, like a two-tined fork with a handle. "Make sure the carrot is big enough, then pull them out with that. Easy as pie."

Tommy wanted to disagree. He felt like Sean had skipped a million steps, like how the hell could he tell if the carrots were the right size, and what the fuck was he holding, and how was it supposed to pull a carrot out of the ground?

"Just watch me do it." Sean knelt down and uncovered the top of a carrot. It must have been big enough, because he stuck the odd tool right next to it and leveraged the carrot out of the ground. The whole process took all of two seconds, and then Sean was onto the next.

"Good?"

Tommy had no idea what he was doing, but he couldn't waste Sean's time, so he nodded and headed for a random patch with greens growing out of the earth.

He swept the dirt away from the base of the leaves and inspected the carrot. It looked... fine? Tommy couldn't tell if it was bigger or smaller than Sean's, so he thought, *fuck it*, and stuck his tool in the ground.

Sean must have had magic hands, because Tommy had no idea how this thing was supposed to help him. He wiggled it a little until the carrot seemed looser, and then yanked the thing out of the ground.

Tommy definitely overestimated the carrot, because he toppled backwards from his own force and landed in the dirt on his back.

Somewhere to his left, Sean burst out laughing. Tommy figured that was fair, considering he was facing the sky with his arm held up high, a carrot in hand.

"Dude," Sean said between breathy laughs, "you don't have to pull that hard."

Tommy turned his head to look at Sean and gave him his best deadpan stare, copied from the Blade himself. *I think I figured that out.*

Sean was still snickering as he held out the basket for Tommy to toss his carrot into. Tommy gave him the middle finger without thinking, caught up in the hilarity of the moment. He froze as soon as he realized what he was doing, but Sean just seemed to laugh harder.

Tommy had to force his body to relax, but Sean didn't seem to notice the panic freezing Tommy's muscles and went back to farming.

"Hey, you can count that as another sign you know," Sean joked, and Tommy's brain took a moment to realize he was talking about the finger.

Fucking hell, he knew all of three words in this language and he'd already figured out how to curse. Great job, Tommy.

He moved onto the next carrot, jaw set with internal anger. This time, Tommy simply pulled the carrot upwards like he was lifting something off a table, and it popped out the ground with little resistance.

Sean started to hum as he worked, and Tommy slowly lost himself in the monotony of farming. It was relaxing, and Sean's presence kept him out of his head. For the second time, Tommy regretted not farming with Techno in Pogtopia, not for the survival skills this time, but just for a quality time.

Hours passed, and Tommy could feel his fingers start to cramp from the work and his hands shake from the exertion. Holding a farming tool was much different than holding a sword, and Tommy still wasn't eating as much as he should, but he kept going. Tommy was used to a little pain, and he wasn't going to just quit.

His hands moved to the next carrot, but they met empty dirt instead of the fluffy leaves Tommy had become familiar with. He looked up, surprised to see Sean leaning on a stump with some bread in his lap. The field was empty, and the sun was much lower in the sky than Tommy had realized.

"I stopped for dinner a bit ago," Sean explained, "I would have stopped you, but you seemed like you were in a groove."

Tommy nodded, still wrapping his head around how long he'd worked for. He dropped his tool and flexed his fingers, cracking them loudly.

Sean flinched. "Dude, that cannot be healthy." Tommy noticed he was still lazily signing with one hand as he tossed pieces of bread into his mouth.

Tommy rolled his eyes and dragged himself to sit near Sean in the grass. Not near enough to touch, but closer than he'd been to a person in a while. Sean wordlessly offered him a piece of bread and a freshly cleaned carrot.

The sun started to set as they had their meal. Tommy mentally checked to make sure he had his bow and shield for the trip through the forest. Sean seemed to notice the same thing.

"You can stay at my place tonight, if you don't want to head back in the dark."

Tommy shook his head. It was the right decision to accept Sean's offer to farm, but he could only take so much change in a day. He missed sleeping in a real room in a real house, but his hovel would have to do for now.

Sean nodded like he expected Tommy's answer. "The offer always stands if you need it."

Tommy wondered what he did to deserve anything Sean had done for him that day.

He stood up, brushing the dirt off his pants and equipping his items for the dark. Sean waved him goodbye and grabbed the baskets of carrots.

Tommy was only a few steps away when Sean yelled, "Wait!"

He stopped, confused, but turned back towards the village. Sean ran towards him, baskets abandoned by the field. Tommy tensed, ready for the impact of a sword or axe, but Sean stopped a few feet away and pulled a handful of emeralds out of his pocket.

"Almost forgot about these!" He dropped them in Tommy's hand. "See ya, mate!"

Tommy had forgotten entirely about the payment Sean had mentioned. He stared at the gems, feeling a little guilty. He hadn't worked for money, simply for his own benefit, *and* Sean had

taken the time to teach him, but he couldn't yell for Sean to come back to return them. Tommy slipped them into his inventory and headed home.

The forest was dark, but Tommy had memorized the area by his home, and it was easy to avoid the mobs that had spawned nearby. He was back home before he knew it.

It was easy to fall asleep that night, considering how exhausted Tommy was. He didn't know how much was due to farming and how much was because of all the "talking" he did. But the nightmares stayed away that night, and Tommy was grateful.

Chapter End Notes

Sign language pog! It's BSL, if you haven't noticed, which I don't know, considering I'm American, but I'm trying to do justice in the descriptions. I'm considering naming the chapters something instead of just "Chapter 6", so let me know if that's something you'd like to see. Later :)

sorry

Chapter Summary

sorry - A fist placed on the chest moving in circles.

Tommy wasn't having a good day. He wasn't having a bad day either, but the fog that had seemed to creep up on him in the past few days had hit full force.

Sean had even commented on it earlier when they were cleaning off the most recent harvest. Tommy, unbeknownst to him, had paused, hands stilled and eyes unfocused on the distance. He'd brushed it off as tiredness and headed home, nails dug into his arms the whole way.

Tommy still hadn't told him his name. He had learned the whole alphabet in sign language days ago, and he still hadn't. Sean hadn't asked, and somehow that made Tommy feel more guilty.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for 500 kudos!! This isn't my first fic, but the first one I've posted on Ao3, and the support is amazing. I'm honestly wowed by all the love, so thank you all again. <3 Special thanks to SilentTeyz for the chapter name ideas, check out the new ones. I've been doing a ton of research into BSL, but I'm not deaf, hard of hearing, or mute, so if I've done something wrong, please let me know!

Anyways, enjoy the update!

Edited 2/10/22

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Thirteen days later...

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Tommy still hadn't told him his name. He had learned the whole alphabet in sign language days ago, and he still hadn't. Sean hadn't asked, and somehow that made Tommy feel more guilty.

Sean had told Tommy almost everything about himself— his family, his past, his hobbies, his dreams. He shared stories about his childhood, the time he'd given his younger sister a scar and cried for days about it, and the day he learned how to ride a horse and promptly fell off. When he spoke about sad things, Sean cried and didn't seem to mind.

"I'm just made to be a crier," he'd say, like it was a joke, but Tommy didn't understand.

Sean let him in his house and room, and then *left him alone* because he trusted Tommy not to do anything.

Trust. It was the first sign he learned that day. One hand vertical hitting the other, horizontal with the palm towards the sky. Tommy thought the sign was way too simple for a word with so much weight.

But Tommy had given Sean nothing in return, and he'd even left early today, and now he was pacing his room with nothing to keep the numbness at bay.

He'd been an idiot, Tommy begrudgingly accepted. He knew that trauma and all that shit didn't leave because he found someone to put up with his bullshit, but he really hoped he could be the exception. Besides, he'd left, and he was safe, and that should be enough, right?

It felt like his thoughts were drowning him. Prime, he fucking hated this feeling. Tommy gripped the base of his hair and tugged slightly, trying to bring himself back to reality.

He had a full set of iron armor, potions, and weapons to defend himself, but he couldn't do anything about the thoughts that seemed set on self-sabotage.

Do you think this is how Wilbur felt?

Tommy slammed his hand down on the top of a chest, relishing in the shock wave that travelled up his arm. It was only hard enough to sting, somehow his body still had enough self-preservation instincts to keep him from really hurting himself.

That wasn't to say Tommy didn't relish the injuries he did get. Sean had to stop him from bleeding all over the carrots after he sliced his hand with a knife. Tommy hadn't even realized.

He brushed his thumb over the cut, now a raised scab, barely red. It would be a scar in a week.

What's one more, really?

Ender, Tommy really wanted to scream. But he hadn't spoken in weeks, and it felt so good to smile at the villagers and receive one in return. None of them had heard him speak, and they hadn't kicked him out, and Tommy knew that was why.

Sean had offered to teach him some curse words one day when they finished their work early. He laughed and spoke casually, but Tommy couldn't keep himself from freezing. He shook his head and stayed tense the rest of the day. Sean never mentioned it.

He'd met a few other villagers as well. Isla, the lovely baker down the street that made Tommy's heart ache for Niki. They were nothing alike, Isla was loud but gentle and Niki was always quiet until her sharp words cut straight to the bone, but he couldn't smell baked bread and not think of her anyways. Isla seemed set on "fattening those skinny arms of his", and Tommy went home everyday with a fresh loaf.

Colin showed up every once and a while to egg on Sean and then disappeared. Sean never really introduced him, just smiled and said, "That's Colin," like it explained everything. Tommy still didn't know if he lived in the village or just came to visit.

The kids in the village seemed to love Tommy, and for the life of him, he couldn't figure out why. If they managed to spot him sneaking around, they'd ambush him before he could do anything. The first time, he'd kneed one of them in the face, but he laughed it off. Tommy felt the impact like a burn for the whole day.

One of them, a little girl named Jill, stuck to him like a leech. Tommy swore she was a partial spider hybrid, because the kid could climb his 6'3 frame in seconds. Her arms would wrap around his neck, loose enough to keep his panic low, and her legs would lock by his stomach, and Tommy would have to spend the better part of an hour convincing her to let go.

Tommy still hadn't told any of them his name. Not Sean, not Isla, not Jill. But they still trusted him, and Tommy couldn't look any of them in the eye without cringing anymore.

It was barely noon, and Tommy felt like he couldn't take another minute of the day. He left his house in a rush, forgetting to close the door, and headed off into the woods.

The forest usually calmed Tommy down, the low hum of nature filling his ears enough to distract him, but it wasn't enough anymore. He could hear his breathing over the whistling breeze, could feel his pounding heartbeat over the low vibrations of a nearby cow's steps.

Ender, what Tommy would give to have Wilbur here to play his guitar and sing. He would even take Quackity's joking tunes over this.

There was nothing for his hands to do except dig into his skin. Tommy always found it surprisingly hard to break skin with his nails, considering the easy job a sword made it. He would leave crescents in his skin, red and angry, but just a few hours later and they would fade.

He wanted something more permanent. It wasn't fair, really. Tommy had never felt this awful, not when he lost his first two lives, not when he had to drink potions mid battle, not

when TNT blew up in his face. If he felt like he was dying inside, he should have something to show for it.

Tommy moved his fingers, raking them up and down his arms. He should have scars.

He had already tried to take a blade to his skin, one night when he couldn't get out of bed that morning. But he couldn't seem to press hard enough to draw blood, even though his sword was expertly sharpened, and it just made Tommy feel like more of a failure.

So he scraped at his arms until he could feel it under his fingers and not from the nerves themselves. He scraped until he felt particles of skin separate themselves and get stuck under his nails.

It took a long time. Much longer than any of the times he had struck someone down with his sword.

Tommy let himself look at his arms. There were red lines running up and down, inflamed and raised. The exposed skin was shiny, and Tommy knew it would scab like a bitch.

He felt vindicated for a moment, but his heart didn't slow down, and his feet kept carrying him through the forest.

Tommy hadn't thought about Tubbo in a long time, or at least it felt like it. He'd avoided bees and music discs, and he pushed down anything the little voice whispered about his old best friend. But now, with nothing to keep the thoughts at bay, they attacked relentlessly.

You're replacing Tubbo with Sean, and you'll push him away the same way.

He wasn't replacing Tubbo. Tubbo kicked him out.

And for good reason, look at how easy you abandoned your friends!

They abandoned him first.

Because you pushed them away. You killed Jack, you disobeyed Dream, you forced Tubbo's hand.

Tubbo never visited you.

Tubbo burned the compass.

Tubbo should have let Dream kill you.

Tommy equipped his sword and slashed it through the nearest tree in one fluid motion, a scream threatening to push through his throat but catching. The slice in the bark looked horrifyingly like a wound, and Tommy imagined blood dripping from it, pooling on the forest floor, soaking—

Get a fucking grip, Tommy. You're freaking out over nothing.

He let himself fall to his knees, head dropped and eyes closed. Tommy's hands drifted to his hair again, wrapping and pulling.

His forehead touched the forest floor, but instead of feeling the pricking of dead pine needles, Tommy felt soft petals and leaves. He opened his eyes, taking a moment for them to focus.

He'd managed to stumble into a patch of dandelions, half yellow and half fuzzy white, ready to fly away in the breeze.

Tommy's traitorous mind pulled up a memory, because of course he couldn't have a fucking moment to breathe, and of course it was about Tubbo.

It was a few weeks before Wilbur had shown up, and Tommy was riding the high of finally finding a place to consider a permanent home. Tubbo had come too, convinced by Tommy, and they were mulling about in a nearby flower forest.

“I don’t understand why we had to travel so far for some fucking flowers, Tubbo,” Tommy grumbled.

Tubbo picked another flower, a tulip of some sort, and tucked it into his inventory. “I can’t make a bee farm without flowers, Tommy.”

“There’s no way you need this many.”

“I don’t *need* this many, but I want the bees to be happy.”

Tommy scuffed his shoe on the ground. “Don’t you want me to be happy? Cause I’m bored right now, you’re making me unhappy.”

Tubbo merely rolled his eyes, immune to Tommy’s bullshit by now. “You can go home if you really want to.”

Tommy elected to ignore that, because then he’d have to admit he was the clingy one. “And besides, there are plenty of flowers at home.”

“Flower forests have more variety.”

“Please,” Tommy whined, dragging out the e, “I wanna do something fun.”

Tubbo flicked his arm. “Stop being a little bitch.”

“Fuck off.”

“Really Tommy, you can leave, I’m not keeping you here,” Tubbo said.

Looking back, Tommy wished he’d said something different. He could have shut up and let Tubbo do what he wanted, or actually told Tubbo how much he appreciated him, which Tommy wished he did more in general, or simply just said he wanted to say.

Instead, Tommy did what he did best, and pushed people away.

“Big man, if I don’t help you pick stupid flowers, no one will.”

Tubbo scowled, an uncommon expression on a normally cheerful face. “You don’t have to be bitter.”

“I’m not fucking bitter, I just—”

“Go home, Tommy, since you obviously want to.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “You’re being dramatic.”

“And you’ve got a piss poor attitude.” Tubbo plucked a dandelion out of the ground with much more force than necessary.

Tommy didn’t quite know what to say, and he paused in following Tubbo. They bantered all the time, exchanging jabs that sounded harsh but never really hit anything sensitive. But it seemed Tommy had missed the mark this time, and Tubbo was genuinely upset, and Tommy, rough rascal of a street kid, didn’t know how to apologize.

Tubbo kept walking. “See you later, Tommy.”

And Tommy went home.

Later, not even a full day afterwards, Tubbo had come to Tommy and admitted he felt like a sidekick to Tommy, and that he didn’t really have friends of his own. Tommy got that sick feeling of guilt that sat low in his stomach. The next day, he made a point to introduce Tubbo to as many people he could find and then mysteriously disappear because he “had a thing.” Tubbo certainly knew what he was doing, and Tommy definitely looked like a fucking creep to the others, but he stumbled upon Tubbo and Ponk throwing eggs at each other a few days later and knew it was worth it.

But Tommy just couldn’t stop making the same mistakes.

With his head resting on dandelions, Tommy wondered how many other times he had nearly fucked up his friendships. Deo never really messaged Tommy anymore. Techno hated him. Wilbur was dead. Tubbo exiled him.

What a fucking track record.

It’s just a matter of time before you piss off Sean and the rest of the village. They’ll come for you with pitchforks and torches.

Tommy pushed himself off the ground and aimed for home. It was obvious being outside wasn’t helping, so hopefully he’d just pass out in bed and wake up to a better day.

As he walked back, the hairs on his arms stood up, and Tommy tensed. He had a sixth sense for danger at this point, and he had learned the hard way to trust it. Eret’s room reeked of suspiciousness, and Dream set him on edge since the day they met, but Tommy ignored his instincts and got hurt because of it. Never again.

Tommy walked lightly, stepping between piles of pine needles so his steps were completely silent. He pulled his sword out again, holding it by his side in a deceptively relaxed position.

A low murmur snaked its way through the forest, and Tommy realized he wasn't alone. There was someone, and from the sound of it, multiple people very close to his house. He couldn't make out any words, let alone who it was.

If he wasn't tense yet, he was now. Someone must have followed him back to his home from the village, and he hadn't noticed in his haze. Tommy wanted to hit himself. Prime, if it was Dream and his buddies here to take him back...

Tommy vowed to go down fighting. They would have his body or nothing at all.

The whispers grew in volume as Tommy got closer to his house. It sounded like they were near the dense thicket of trees outside his door, which meant he wouldn't be able to get a good look at them.

Tommy dropped into a crouch and hid behind a tree right behind the mound that was his home. With any luck, they hadn't spotted the door, and they would follow his trail deeper into the forest.

There were definitely at least three people, judging by the scuffling of their feet, and they were light on their feet, too light for an average villager. Tommy tightened the grip on his sword.

A shape stepped out from behind the thicket, and Tommy moved on instinct. He bashed his shield into their form, knocking them to the ground, and pointed his sword at their neck.

Fuck. Fuck. *Fucking fuck.*

The group of village kids stood in front of him, and Jill was at his feet, sword centimeters from cutting her throat. She had tears in her eyes and a cut where he must have nicked her

arms.

Tommy withdrew his sword and threw it across the forest floor, far away from the kids. They seemed frozen in fear, ready to bolt or jump in front of Tommy. He would commend their bravery if it wasn't stupid.

Jill pushed herself onto her elbows and brought one hand to touch her throat. Tommy hadn't cut her there, but he understood what she was feeling. He had the scar on his neck to prove it.

"Mister?" she said, and Prime fucking dammit, how had he not recognized that the voices were *children*.

Tommy couldn't move his hands, couldn't sign. They were still clenched around the ghost of a sword hilt.

One of the other kids grabbed Jill's arms and pulled her out from under Tommy's shadow. His eyes raked across her form, taking in the scrapes on her forearms and the now bleeding cut. Prime, he hurt a fucking *kid*. He was no better than Dream, or Techno, or any of the other bastards in the SMP.

Jill stood, shaky but alive, and Tommy knew because he couldn't look away from her heaving chests, ribs expanding and contracting to take in heavy breaths. She was alive. She was alive.

But all Tommy could see was Techno standing over Tubbo with a rocket launcher pointed at his head, Wilbur's hand on his wrist. And then Dream was blocking out the sun, threatening Tommy with a stick of TNT, and it looked so similar to what filled the button room when Tommy talked Wilbur down.

"Put your armor in the hole."

Tommy ripped his chestplate off, snapping the leather straps and slicing through his hand in one go. It clattered on the ground in front of him, no hole this time, but he had to take it off, he had to survive. Tommy tossed his tools down as well, the iron ringing.

The kids in front of him flinched, and Prime, how could Tommy forget they were there? They had backed up even further now, a few paces from his house. It didn't make Tommy feel any better. He knew he could grab his sword and cross the space in a second, or maybe he would just use his fists like the fucking trapped animal he felt like.

He needed to leave. He was a danger to these kids, and it didn't matter if they found his house anymore, he had to get the fuck out *now*.

Tommy spun on his heel and ran out of the clearing.

Some of the kids shouted for him to wait and come back, but Tommy knew better, knew that he would hurt them if he stayed. Prime, he'd been so fucking stupid, thinking he could just cozy up with the villagers and pretend everything was fine.

He hadn't even spoken and he'd fucked up.

Tommy never should have come here. He should have fallen off that tower weeks ago. He should have walked into L'manburg and let Dream spear him through, or begged Phil to kill him too, or stayed in that hole Wilbur put him in, or jumped in front of Tubbo, or never even fucking woke up after that arrow went through his chest.

The spruce forest transitioned to plains, and Tommy could see the village just over the horizon. He could turn himself in, let them have a public execution for justice, but Tommy would just be putting the job onto someone else's shoulders. There was no nether portal nearby, and Tommy didn't have the tools to make one, not even a water bucket. He could build another tower, but the villagers would have to scrape his body off the grass.

There was a lava pool nearby.

Tommy knew, he'd seen it one night, lighting up the area just in render distance of the village. It wasn't the lava seas of the Nether, but it would have to do, because Tommy was getting desperate.

He caught himself signing, repeating the motion for sorry over and over. Tommy wondered when he started. His chest felt numb from rubbing it with his knuckles over and over.

Tommy's feet hit stone and stopped by a small dip in the ground that led to lava. It was a small pool, barely a dozen source blocks, but he could feel the heat radiating from there. Tommy knew from experience that if he stayed long enough, his shoes would melt.

He sat down. This felt so much different to Logstedshire. In exile, all Tommy wanted was to escape. Prime, he was so naive, thinking that going back to L'manburg would solve all his problems. Now, he knew that the problem wasn't where he was, it was just him.

Just stupid Tommyinnit, the annoying kid that no one really wanted around except to use as a punching bag.

It would be easier if he left.

Tommy wondered what the SMP would think. Would Dream stumble upon the village in a few days, asking for the kid with blonde hair? Would they tell him that Tommy took a dip in lava and let his flesh slide off his bones? Would Dream go back to L'manburg and tell everyone? Maybe they would have a funeral, and everyone would have to pretend they were sad like they did at Schlatt's.

Or maybe Dream wouldn't tell anyone because no one really cared, and Tommy would be known in history as the first Vice President of L'manburg, a footnote of trivia for kids to learn about and then quickly forget.

The sun was setting, Tommy noticed. Lava lit up the area pretty well, but mobs had started to spawn elsewhere. He hoped the kids were safe. If they were smart, they went home, and Jill was getting her arm wrapped by caring parents who would tuck her in tonight with lots of forehead kisses.

Tommy didn't remember his parents. Good riddance, he'd always thought, no point in crying over people that abandoned him. He considered Wilbur his brother, but they never really talked about it, and Tommy had never felt comfortable getting that close to Phil. Techno... well, it didn't matter what he thought about Techno.

He wasn't special. Plenty of people in the SMP were orphans or runaways, especially since they were hybrids. Tommy always considered it a blessing that Tubbo's horns grew in late, once he was safe in L'manburg and off the streets. People had come to Dream's server for safety and peace, and to escape the horrible lives they'd had, and Tommy had waltzed in and ruined it all. Fundy had a dad, and Phil had a son, and Tommy had done nothing to prevent his death.

So Tommy didn't have any family to say goodbye to, and he'd know Sean for all of three weeks. He scanned his inventory for anything of value. A couple of iron ingots, a name tag a villager had given him, and his emeralds. Tommy took them out and placed them on the grass. Someone would find them eventually.

The night wind was brutally cold but the lava heated him from the bottom, and Tommy felt like he was stuck between shivering violently and shivering. It probably wasn't just the temperature, considering his heart felt like it was three sizes too big for his ribcage and beat like it knew it was trapped.

Tommy sucked in a breath. All he had to do was tip forward, but his hands had locked themselves around the long grass, and Tommy couldn't relax them. He mentally cursed his body for its stupid survival instinct.

The lava was right there— he was so close.

All Tommy had to do was let go.

Haha y'all though you could have a fluffy chapter last time and just get away with it?
Not in my Tommyinnit angst and healing fic. >:D

On a serious note, however, Tommy's situation isn't unique. Within the first three months to a year following a suicide attempt, people are at highest risk of a second attempt. 30% of people that attempt try again, especially those of a younger age. It's important to remember that surviving a suicide attempt doesn't fix the issues behind it, and that survivors still need help. Please reach out if you need help.

If any of you are interested in learning sign language or writing about it, I would recommend the site YouGlish (it scans youtube videos for signs) and looking up the sign with "BSL cover" in youtube. Lots of people upload sign language covers, and it's a great way to support the community, listen to some great songs, and study the inflection and minute details about the sign that are sometimes missed in dictionaries.

help

Chapter Summary

help - Right hand in a thumbs up, placed on a palm and pushed forwards.

All Tommy had to do was let go.

Chapter Notes

Buckle up, readers, and I hope you enjoy as always.

2/10/22

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

All Tommy had to do was let go.

He was too deep in his own thoughts to hear the footsteps behind him until someone walked into his field of vision. Tommy flinched, nails still dug into the ground, but stayed where he was. Even if his body let him move, Tommy didn't know whether he'd fall into the lava or run.

Sean sat down on the edge of the lava pool, just barely in Tommy's line of sight, and certainly too far away to catch him if he moved.

“Jill's alright— they all are. It's just a scratch, and she's already bragging about the scar she'll have.”

Tommy tensed even more. It didn't matter if she wasn't hurt, he knew there were more ways to damage someone than a sword wound. He knew what Dream could do, and he knew he could do the same.

He remembered being excited about his first scar. Tommy was still living on the streets— it would be years before he would meet Wilbur or even Tubbo. It was pouring, and Tommy was running from someone— he couldn't remember who, and it didn't really matter, but he slipped on the wet cobble road and sliced his leg open. He told the other kids it was from fighting.

Sean wasn't even looking at him, keeping his gaze into the distance. "No one's mad at you. The kids shouldn't have followed you, they know better than to invade someone's privacy."

Fucking hell, Tommy wanted to scream. Sean wasn't getting it, wasn't getting the problem. They *should* be mad at him. But he couldn't sign, not with his hands paralyzed, and he had never wanted to speak less in his life.

"You're still upset."

Tommy realized he was crying, and his face contorted in that way it does when you're sobbing your heart out, but he wasn't making any sound. Distantly, he realized he hadn't cried since Wilbur died.

At some point, Sean had turned to look at him. Tommy couldn't make out his face through the tears blurring his vision, but he could see his auburn hair glowing red with the light of the lava. His hands were free of weapons or anything else. Tommy had no fucking clue why Sean was here, or what he was trying to do, but he really just wanted him to leave and let Tommy break in peace.

Of course, the universe never let him have anything, and Sean kept talking. "I can't help unless you communicate."

Ah, so he was here to help. Tommy thought it was a bit of a lost cause.

He tried to relax his hands again, but they stayed locked around the grass, and Tommy almost let out of a rumble of frustration.

Tommy tilted his face towards Sean as much as his body would allow, and mouthed the words, "I can't."

Sean stayed quiet until Tommy repeated himself a few times, eventually letting out a small gasp. "Your hands are bleeding."

Tommy couldn't look. It didn't matter, really, as soon as he could move all his injuries would melt away in the lava.

"You have to focus on me right now, can you do that?"

Tommy couldn't. Fuck. He couldn't do it.

"I need a response." Sean's voice was firm but void of any anger, and Tommy didn't want to upset him. Or maybe he did? Maybe he could get Sean to push him in, that way he wouldn't have to wait to move.

Sean moved closer to Tommy, shuffling half a meter towards him, and Tommy tensed even further. He felt like he was already on fire, his nerves lighting up and setting him on edge.

"Hey, you have to look at me." And Tommy did. He didn't know why, just knew that his body was out of his control.

The tears were gone, mostly, and Tommy could see Sean's face clearly. He looked as tense as Tommy felt, but more importantly, he looked terrified. And Tommy knew what that meant, he could understand terror. It was on Wilbur's face when he challenged Dream, on Tubbo's when Techno pointed a rocket launcher at him, and written all over his own when he looked at his reflection in polish obsidian. It had been a while since he'd seen such terror on a face so young and new, free of scars and wrinkles and frown lines, but he still recognized it. But Tommy didn't know *why* Sean was so afraid.

Sure, Tommy was seconds away from offing himself, and maybe Sean was scared of people dying, but he could look away or just leave. They'd grown close to something like friends over the past weeks, but Sean hadn't even known Tommy a month ago. He had never heard him speak, didn't know where he lived, didn't know his name. Tommy was inconsequential.

But the terror stayed, and Tommy couldn't look away.

"Good, that's great," Sean breathed, "Can you move your hands?"

Tommy shook his head.

"Alright, that's fine, that's— that's fine. Can you move at all?"

He shook his head again.

A large bubble of gas popped through the surface of the lava, startling them both. Tommy's head snapped back towards the lava.

Right, that's why he was here. He needed to stay focused.

"Hey, hey, eyes back on me." Sean's voice was leaking panic, so much that even Tommy winced. He looked back.

Sean was close enough that Tommy could see him finely shaking all over, and his fists were clenched at his sides like it was taking all his effort to keep them there.

"We're going to stay here until you can move, okay? And then we'll head back to my house, or— or yours, that's fine, and I'll teach you some animal signs. We can start with cow! How does that sound?"

Tommy hadn't told him about his favorite mob. He didn't even know how to, but somehow Sean knew.

He still shook his head.

"Alright, we can learn something else. Flowers, maybe? Or you can just head to bed, it's been a long day," Sean said.

Tommy didn't know what he wanted. He'd already decided on jumping into the lava once he could, but he was starting to feel the pain in his hands, and Prime, he really was exhausted.

But he'd made this mistake once already. Tommy had been on top of that pillar, he'd had the chance weeks ago, but he was too much of a pussy to go through with it. And now he'd hurt a kid and yelled at some people in a village and wasted Sean's time and— fuck, why couldn't he have just killed himself in exile?

"Hey, you're zoning out."

Tommy snapped back to the world. His hands were relaxing. Oh Prime, fuck, *fuck*, his hands were relaxing. He could flex his fingers, he could wiggle his toes.

Sean must have noticed too, and immediately looked more nervous. "What do you say? I can make some carrot soup, put our harvest to good use, right?"

Tommy let his vision slide back to the lava. He was shivering now, not like Sean was, but violently, waves of vibrations rolling across his body.

Sean was saying something but Tommy had tuned him out. There wasn't a point when the lava was calling instead. If he closed his eyes, he could pretend the blocks underneath him were smooth obsidian and the heat was in the air and not just the magma below him.

He let go of the grass and flexed his hands one last time. There was nothing stopping him now, really.

Tommy didn't know why, but he turned back to Sean, just for a second. Just to see.

He was crying, and his mouth was moving too fast for Tommy to lipread, so he had to wait for his hearing to focus back on Sean's voice. "-the love of God, please just look at me. Please, please, don't-" his voice cracked, almost shattering. Tommy could only listen in shock.

Sean must have noticed Tommy's eyes back on him, picking his speech back up. "I don't know what happened to you, but I can promise you, it's not gonna happen again. I don't care if someone hurt you or you hurt someone, or both, or whatever, but I swear to God you're safe here."

Prime, Tommy wanted to believe him. It would be so easy to step back from the ledge— he'd done it once, he could do it again.

"Whatever is making you feel this way, it's not going to be that way forever. There are people that can help— I want to help if you'll let me."

Sean never called him kid. Tommy thought about all their conversations, back to the very start, and Sean never called him a child. In fact, if Tommy really looked at him, Sean couldn't have been older than Wilbur. But Wilbur had put him down, hurt him, and Sean hadn't.

Sean taught him how to sign and prioritized words like "danger" and "help" before the alphabet. Sean taught Tommy how to take care of the earth to hold a harvest, and then let him eat as many of the spoils as he wanted. Sean reminded him to clean the dirt off his hands when he forgot so his cuts wouldn't get infected.

The kids played with him and told him outlandish stories even though scars crossed his face and he acted much too old for his age. Isla made him a cake, and when he told her he didn't

fancy cake anymore, she baked him a dozen cookies. The villagers never asked questions about his voice, but Tommy suspected Sean had something to do with that.

Help.

Tommy placed one hand in the other and formed a thumb's up. He couldn't complete the sign, not with the way he was shaking, but Sean knew his limited vocabulary and would get it anyways.

"Help."

"Help, yes— yes, I can help," Sean said, "Do you want me to help you?"

Tommy nodded slowly and repeated the sign.

Sean let out a breath sharp enough for Tommy to hear. "Alright, is it okay if I move?"

"Yes," Tommy signed, a motion quite similar to knocking on a door. He hadn't understood why Sean had taught him yes and no when he could just nod or shake his head, but he was grateful now. Tommy didn't think he had the energy to look away from Sean.

His hands fell back into the sign for help subconsciously. Sean stood slowly, obviously trying not to spook Tommy, and approached him with arms out.

"Can I touch you?"

"Yes."

Sean's hands found his own and migrated to his forearms, gripping tightly. Tommy stood with him, grateful for the support. He didn't look at the lava.

They turned away from the edge, and Tommy was hit with a wave of exhaustion. Sean noticed his stumbling and wrapped an arm around Tommy's waist to support him. Tommy leaned into him.

Sean walked Tommy back towards the village. There was a path of torches leading them back to safety that Tommy was sure hadn't been there last night, but no villagers in sight. Tommy wondered if Jill was asleep or still up showing everyone her cool new scar.

Sean led them through the empty streets and to his house, pausing just before the doorstep to make sure Tommy was alright with it. He couldn't care less where he slept that night, but he didn't have the words to say that, so he just nodded.

The house was filled with the warm light of lanterns, nothing like overexposed white lava that had burned his retinas for too long. Tommy blinked the spots out of his vision.

Sean sat him down in a chair and started wrapping his hands with bandages that Tommy hadn't even seen him grab. In fact, there were dozens of healing potions and bottles of magma cream on the table. Sean didn't own a brewing stand. Tommy was too tired to think.

Tommy had stopped shaking at some point during the walk home, but Sean was still very visibly on edge. As soon as he was finished with the bandages, Tommy grabbed his hands and squeezed.

Sean sighed, his body shaking through it, and let his head drop onto their hands. "Please don't do that again."

Tommy nodded even though Sean couldn't see it and squeezed his hands again. *I promise*, he thought, *I promise*.

They sat like that for a few minutes while Sean calmed down, and Tommy was content to let him. It was starting to hit him how close to death he'd been, and how Sean had been the sole barrier between Tommy and it. Prime, he'd put so much pressure on him.

Sean must have been a mind reader, because as soon as Tommy felt the guilt start to gnaw at him, he lifted his head.

"Stop that," he said.

Tommy raised an eyebrow.

"You're thinking loudly. I can hear you blaming yourself up there." Maybe he actually could read minds.

Sean pushed a regen potion into his hands. "I'm glad I was there. Prime, when the kids came running back to the village and told us what happened... I— I don't know what I thought, but I'm glad I found you."

Tommy drank the potion without argument. He figured he owed Sean that, at least.

"Help," Tommy said, *"thank you."*

"You're welcome, dude, any time— and I mean that quite literally. I would rather you come to me with anything that's upsetting you even if you think you're bothering me."

Tommy nodded and lifted his hands, mentally repeating the signs he'd learned a week ago.
"T. O. M. M. Y."

Sean watched intently, not getting it until Tommy finished and dropped his hands.

“Tommy.” Sean made eye contact with him, searching for something, it looked like. “Your name is Tommy.”

He nodded for what felt like the eightieth time that night.

Sean looked stunned until he seemed to remember himself. Sticking out his hand, he said, “Nice to meet you properly, Tommy, I’m Sean.” If Tommy looked closely, he could see tears in his eyes.

Tommy grinned and took Sean’s hand, shaking it with much more force than he needed to.

Sean winced. “Ow, you’ve got a grip like a raptor.” But he smiled with Tommy, and it felt like he could breathe properly for the first time in hours.

Standing up, Sean tidied the table and conspicuously wiped his eyes, which Tommy elected to ignore.

“No offense, Tommy, but you look like you’re about to pass out. I can walk you home, if you want, but I’ve got an extra bed in a chest around here somewhere I can set up pretty quickly, or there’s an inn with a room open I think, or, uh, I don’t know if you’re comfortable with—”

Tommy cut him off by clapping his hands once, a simple replacement for a shout. Sean seemed to get the message and faced him, muttering a quick, “Sorry.”

“*Here,*” Tommy finger-spelled and gave a thumbs up.

Sean smiled and pulled out a bed. It was much better quality than what Tommy had in his house, which wasn’t saying much, honestly, but Tommy was used to the dirt and would take pretty much anything at this point.

He face-planted on the blanket as soon as Sean set it up. Sean snorted but kept his mouth shut, and Tommy sent up a silent prayer to Church Prime for that.

Sean was right, he was tired in every inch of his body, but he waited till the lanterns were out and Sean had climbed into his own bed to relax. It was odd, sleeping in a room with someone else, but Tommy trusted Sean— even if he didn't quite know why.

“Goodnight, Tommy,” Sean murmured. He said Tommy's name like it was something to be savored, and warmth spread through him, only aided by the blankets tucked around him.

Tommy flopped a hand up in the air in replacement of a goodbye and hoped he saw it.

And Tommy slept.

Chapter End Notes

If any of you have seen the glitched clip of "Shaun!" from Heavy Rain, I want you to know that's all I think of while writing this thing.

Anyways, I hope y'all's day was good! Mine was crazy good, I got surprise vaccinated, increased my med dose, and ate some heavenly good chicken nuggets. It's the small things, right?

I wanted to clarify for anyone commenting, my pronouns are she/her, and I'm good with y'all calling me Celestial or Author, I don't mind either. <3 Honestly, all the love has totally blown me away. I'll be writing some one shots and other stories eventually, so if you wanna see that, don't be shy and drop a user subscription. I think I'll just write DSMP stuff for now, but who knows in the future? I'm just happy y'all are here for the ride. :)

trust

Chapter Summary

trust - One hand vertical hitting the other, horizontal with the palm towards the sky.

Tommy woke up with the feeling that something was wrong.

He knew where he was, months of war never let him lose sense of his surroundings even during sleep. Sean's house was quiet, no sounds of danger from outside, and Tommy didn't see any wounds on himself that needed immediate treatment.

So why did he feel like someone had taken the world and put it through a looking glass, slightly warped but focused?

Chapter Notes

Ayup?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy woke up with the feeling that something was wrong.

He knew where he was, months of war never let him lose sense of his surroundings even during sleep. Sean's house was quiet, no sounds of danger from outside, and Tommy didn't see any wounds on himself that needed immediate treatment.

So why did he feel like someone had taken the world and put it through a looking glass, slightly warped but focused?

Tommy got out of bed, and instead of the constant ache of sore muscles, he felt... nothing. His bad shoulder was still stiff from Dream's arrow, so he could still feel old injuries, it was as if the constant exhaustion of living had melted away.

Sean roused from his sleep as soon as Tommy started to walk around, rubbing his eyes with a loose fist and yawning.

“Sorry,” Tommy said as soon as Sean looked up.

Sean waved his hand. “No worries, mate, I’m a light sleeper. Besides, aren’t farmers supposed to get up at the crack of dawn?”

Tommy shrugged and jumped when his back made loud popping sounds. Sean looked slightly surprised. Tommy twisted at the hips, wincing as they cracked as well.

“Are you alright? Was the bed stiff?”

It wasn’t, so Tommy shook his head, but he did wonder if the bed had something to do with the way he felt. He lifted his hands to ask Sean about it but realized he didn’t have half of the necessary vocabulary. Tommy dropped them into fists and just shook his head again.

Sean didn’t let it go. “Do you have a bed at home?”

“Yes.”

Tommy’s face must have given something away, or maybe the way his hands hesitated, because Sean immediately frowned.

“Do you really?”

“Bad.”

Sean laughed. “No wonder you sound like you’ve got fireworks in your bones. A bad bed can really mess you up. I went camping for a few weeks once and couldn’t bend over to farm the day I got back.”

Tommy was glad he couldn’t talk. If he could, he might have said something about his tent in Logstedshire before he thought about it. Tommy wondered what Sean would say. He didn’t really want to think about it.

So, he just nodded and cracked his back one last time. The lines he had dug into his skin yesterday were already scabbed over, raised and dark red. Where the scab had been ripped away, Tommy could see faint pink, the unnatural sheen of skin weaving itself back together. It reminded him of Tubbo’s scar, the one that spread across his whole body, unable to truly heal itself.

“We should probably wrap those as well,” Sean said, breaking Tommy out of his thoughts.

He shook his head. The wound wasn’t even open anymore, and if more scabbing formed, it would attach itself to the bandages. Tommy remembered plenty of skinned knees sticking to his pants overnight, and the unpleasant feeling of ripping his skin every morning.

“I’ve got plenty of bandages, if that’s-”

Tommy cut him off with waving hands. He paused, taking a moment to plan out a mini game of charades. He grabbed a scarf hanging by the door and wrapped it around his arm once, careful to not actually drag it across the scabs. Then, he ripped it off violently and mimicked an expression of pain.

As great as Sean was, he obviously did not have as much first aid experience as Tommy. To be fair, he doubted most people did. That being said, Sean still looked just as confused after Tommy’s attempt to communicate.

How the fuck was he supposed to act out your skin attaching itself to a bandage? It’s not like that kind of thing came with sign language basics, either.

Tommy mimed writing in the air, hoping Sean had a book and quill lying around.

“I’ve got paper, but no quill.”

He huffed, spinning around to look for something that would help. If Tommy’s stupid voice would work, they could get over this hurdle easily. He ignored the start of whispers that told him he wasn’t worthy to speak. Tommy had promised, after all.

There was nothing in Sean’s house that Tommy could use as a prop, and Sean just looked more and more confused as Tommy ran around his house.

“I don’t know,” Tommy said, and moved his hands like little mouths talking.

“Sorry,” Sean said, “we can work more on that today if you’d like.”

Tommy shook his head. As much as he knew he needed to learn some more signs, he didn’t think he could focus on much without taking care of a few things.

“Jill,” he finger-spelled.

Sean frowned. “Are you sure that’s a good idea?”

“Yes.” And he crossed his arms to make a point. *I know what I’m doing*, Tommy wanted to say.

Sean didn’t push it, just gave Tommy a once over and nodded. “We need breakfast first. How about we stop at Isla’s and grab some fresh bread? I’m a bit tired of carrots.”

Tommy raised an eyebrow comically as he started to put on his shoes.

“Oh shut up.”

-

The walk to the bakery was quiet, most of the villagers still asleep. The few that Tommy saw give him a simple smile or wave and moved on. Sean had said that Jill was fine and nobody was mad, but they weren't... anything. Everyone was acting like nothing happened yesterday, and Tommy wasn't moments from death.

Everyone knew. He knew they knew. Looking back on the fuzzy memory of the previous night, he spotted hints of people helping Sean. The torches leading them back to the village, the healing supplies back at his house, even the kids going to grab Sean in the first place.

Tommy could pick apart the situation and analyze with the a general's eye. It's what he'd been trained to do, after all. But he couldn't understand *why*.

The world was based around the survival of fittest. That's how it was on the servers Tommy roamed before he grew up, on Hypixel, in the war between Business Bay and the Antarctic Empire, and that's how it was on the Dream SMP.

Sure, families stuck together, and friendships made bonds just as tight, but those took *years* to develop. Technoblade knew Tubbo for months before the festival, and he still killed him. It was kill or be killed.

And for whatever reason, this little village tucked away from civilization was breaking the rules that Tommy thought were the foundation of life.

Or, at least some of the villagers were.

Tommy and Sean were just a few houses away from the bakery when a shout came from behind.

“You let him back into the village?”

They turned to come face to face with a man and his child, a kid Tommy recognized from the group that played with him. He didn’t know the kid’s name, and he hadn’t met the father.

Sean held up his hands placatingly. “Jimmy, he needed a place to stay last night.”

“Yeah, cause he lives in a hole in a ground that he attacked *children* to defend. My child, I might add.”

“I know yesterday was a stressful situation-”

Jimmy moved in front of his kid. “Stressful, my fucking ass, I was terrified! Aaron comes running home telling me the Luter’s kid almost got stabbed, and you’re just letting him get away with it!”

“The kids were following him,” Sean snapped, “he had no idea they weren’t dangerous.”

“And how the fuck do you know that? It’s not like he could tell you, huh?”

If Tommy wasn’t frozen in fear, he may have laughed. He wasn’t wrong, was he? Sean must have talked to Jill before finding him at the pool.

But Sean was pissed now, body language becoming sharper and sharper, and Tommy was starting to get worried. He’d never seen the guy properly mad, only annoyed when a flock of bunnies ate some of his crop overnight.

“You do *not* get to make fun of someone with a disability,” Sean hissed, jabbing his finger in Jimmy’s direction.

Disability. Tommy hadn’t thought of it that way. Disabilities were for people that had lost limbs or their hearing. His vocal chords weren’t damaged, hypothetically, Tommy could speak whenever. It felt wrong to take the title of disabled from a person that actually deserved it.

Jimmy’s shout brought him back to the conversation. “-any idea where he came from? Guy shows up with a bunch of nasty scars and you let him sleep in your house? He could be a murderer on the run, a criminal, or- or he’s been exiled-”

The world froze.

Right, he was exiled.

That must be Dream yelling at him.

Tommy didn’t have any armor. He took it off last time. There wasn’t time to make any more. He rummaged through his inventory, pulling out anything of value. A pickaxe, some food, a shield. Tommy dropped it all in front of him.

I don’t have anymore, he tried to say, *I have nothing more* . But the words stayed stuck in his throat, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t give everything to Dream. And for that, he knew the punishment.

Tommy kneeled, dust coating his pants. He didn’t remember Logstedshire being this dirty- it must have been from the TNT.

He wondered what it would be this time. Dream seemed to fancy stabbing him, letting his blood drain out until Tommy felt like he couldn’t breathe, and then splashing a health potion on him. Never regeneration. Dream liked the scars.

But Dream had been bored lately, he'd been experimenting. Last time, he cut Tommy's throat and let him drown in his own blood. At least it wasn't burning.

Maybe he'd use his channeling trident. After the beach party, Dream had pondered out loud what the effects would be on a player like he wasn't talking to his test subject face to face.

Tommy just closed his eyes and hoped it would be quick.

Dream's hand cupped his cheek, gentle and warm. Tommy hated this part, where Dream would go all soft and fuzzy and pretend like everything was fine. He hated it because he craved it. He craved it because it was the only touch he'd have in days, and then he would almost die. And so Tommy knew, with touch came pain, no matter how much he wanted them separate.

A second hand joined, this one pressed against his pulse point. Tommy stayed as still as possible. Maybe if he was good, Dream would just cut his throat, simple and clean.

Dream was talking to him like always, but Tommy tried to tune him out as best as possible. He played Wait over and over in his head. Sure, he loved his discs, Cat and Mellohi, but Wait was his favorite song and came unattached. He could sing it without thinking of Tubbo.

A third hand joined, and Tommy stiffened. Dream had brought someone with him? Someone with small hands, smaller than anyone he could think of. Niki, maybe?

Dream's hands left, and Tommy was left with the stranger. He wasn't sure if he was relieved or scared. On one hand, the new person could be much kinder than Dream, but on the other, there were always crueller ways to make someone hurt.

You won't know until you look .

Tommy opened his eyes slowly, not wanting to make Dream angry. Dream didn't like sudden movements.

The scene in front of him gave Tommy whiplash. Real, proper whiplash, the kind that made your head spin from explosion after explosion.

Jill stood in front of him, Sean and her mother to her side. Her hand was on Tommy's face, and it took him a moment to connect the two scenes. The person that joined Dream was Jill, but Jill wasn't in Logstedshire, and Dream wasn't in the village, which meant Dream wasn't here.

Dream wasn't here.

Fuck, it had been Sean's hands, hadn't it? Tommy let himself slump to the ground, strings cut like a marionette.

"Tommy, can you hear me?" Sean's voice wafted through his ears, almost passing out the other side before Tommy could catch the words. Someone was singing.

He gave a lazy thumbs up and leaned his arms onto the ground. Fuck, it felt like he'd run a marathon in gold armor.

Jill was singing, that's who it was. It was a simple melody, something close to a lullaby, and Jill was as on pitch as Tommy could expect from a kid. Surprisingly, it helped. There weren't kids in Logstedshire, and Jill was so full of childhood innocence it forced Tommy out of his head.

"Tommy, can you respond with a sign?" Sean asked, "I want to make sure you know where you are."

Tommy nodded, taking a second to gather his thoughts. He leaned back on his knees and brought a vertical hand down onto his palm.

“Trust.” It was one of the few signs he could actually remember with his head all wonky, and it got most of his thoughts across. Tommy was getting good at that.

Sean nodded. “Thank you. Do you need something?”

Now that Tommy had moved his weight off his hands, Jill took the opportunity to climb into his lap. He fell back on his butt, mostly in surprise, but Tommy stayed calm.

Jill’s mother looked... oddly okay with all of this. Sean just looked relieved.

Jill was still singing, but her hands had migrated from Tommy’s face to his hair. It was quite matted considering Tommy hadn’t properly washed it in... well, in a while, but Jill never really seemed to care about getting her hands dirty. Just the other day she had dove into a mud pile just to grab a handful to throw at the other kids. It reminded Tommy of something Tubbo would do.

Tommy remembered Sean’s question and shook his head. Jill was an unexpected help. He remembered a conversation he’d had with Tubbo about getting emotional support dogs now that the war was over. He’d joked about Tommy getting a cow instead. Now, it felt like he had an emotional support kid.

Jill’s shirt covered her arm, so Tommy couldn’t spot the damage he’d done, but she was moving fine. He searched her face for any sign of pain, but even with her arms up and digging into his scalp, Jill was fine.

She finished her lullaby with a note that seemed much too intense for the original version and grinned. “My brother gets nightmares sometimes, and that’s that song that Mommy sings to him.”

“Thank you,” Tommy said. Sean translated from behind.

Tommy focused on him for a second. “*Jimmy?*” he finger-spelled, “*Where?*”

“He’s back home. Don’t worry about it.”

Tommy gave him a hard stare that he hoped communicated something like *that’s bullshit*. Sean just shrugged. Prick.

“Jill, sweetheart, why don’t we let Tommy stand up? I’m sure his legs are getting tired,” Jill’s mother said. She hopped off his lap and ran to her side.

“Can he play today?”

Jill’s mother looked to Sean, who looked to Tommy, who had no idea what to fucking say. Playing meant the other kids as well, and he wasn’t sure if he was ready for all that.

Tommy’s indecision must have been enough, because Sean said, “I’m sorry, Jill, but Tommy has some things he has to do. Maybe later?” It was a flimsy excuse, but Jill was a gullible kid who trusted Tommy, and therefore Sean, too much for her own good.

Jill’s mother took her hand and led them away. “Come on, Jill. We’ll see them later.”

“Bye Tommy!” Jill called, and Tommy realized it was the first time she had said his name.

Sean helped him to his feet. “You sure you’re alright, mate?”

“*Yes.*” Tommy was starting to like signing, even for the simple words he could already communicate. He felt... independent, almost?

Tommy waited for the inevitable question about his sudden breakdown in the middle of the road, but Sean jumped into a tirade about Jimmy and how he'd been "hiking up his prices for months, the mad man, and when the council went to talk to him about it, he pretended not to be home! And don't get me started on the time..."

It was utter nonsense that Tommy barely understood and fairly didn't care about, but Jimmy did seem like an asshole, which made him feel better. The more Sean ranted, the more Tommy got out of his head and stayed in the real world.

Soon enough, they were stepping into a shop, and Tommy was hit with the smell of baked bread and something sugary.

And with a warm loaf in his hand and a cup of tea loaded with honey on the table, Tommy could almost forget.

Chapter End Notes

I don't know if I originally got the idea of Dream torturing Tommy from this fic, but it's the one I can remember, and it's done horribly well, so go give it a read and cry your eyes out!

<https://archiveofourown.org/series/2114571>

If you want the songs I listened to for this chapter, just stream "Gone Away" by CG5 on repeat until the words don't sound like English anymore! I have fixated and there's nothing anyone can do to stop me. >:)

Much love to all my commenters, y'all know who you are <3

home

Chapter Summary

home - The tips of both hands touching to form an inverted “V”

Tommy brushed away the branch that covered his door and kicked it open. He ended up staying a few nights at Sean’s house after the night at the lava pool until Sean mentioned an abandoned house on the edge of the village. Apparently, some old farmer died a few years back and no one took the property.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this update took so long, I just couldn't get the pacing right, and I had to write a whole other chapter to take a break (whoops). But here it is, hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Two months later...

“You know,” Sean grumbled, ducking under yet another branch, “when you said you lived in the spruce forest, I thought you meant on the edge, not a million kilometers away from anyone.”

“I didn’t want to be near people,” Tommy said.

“I’m getting that idea.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. *“It’s not that far, you’re just...”* He snapped his fingers, trying to remember the sign.

“Lazy?”

“Yes!”

“Firstly, I take offence to that,” Sean joked, “and secondly, I don’t think I know that sign. It’s probably in one of the books if you want to look when we get back.”

Tommy shook his head, grinning. *“I’ll just call you a bitch instead.”*

“I never should have taught you how to swear.”

“I would have just finger-spelled insults at you until you did.”

It’s what Tommy did for the words he couldn’t learn, whether they were too obscure or Sean didn’t know them. In fact, he was getting so fast at it that Sean had to tell him to slow down a few times.

His old energy had returned, probably because Tommy was actually eating enough food. In the SMP, he would channel his energy into pranks and insults, but now his hands took most of Tommy’s speed, whether they were pulling carrots out of the ground or signing.

Sean sighed. “Yeah, you would have.”

Thankfully, he didn’t bring up the first time Sean offered to teach him swears in sign. Tommy had, predictably, not taken it well. It took another lullaby from Jill and hundreds of apologies from Sean before he was able to calm down.

Sean didn’t swear, something about his “Irish grandmother rising from the grave to drag him to hell” or whatever, but he didn’t mind when Tommy did it.

They stepped into the clearing in front of Tommy's hovel, and Tommy clapped in mock celebration.

"See? Not that far."

"My feet are killing me."

Tommy brushed away the branch that covered his door and kicked it open. He ended up staying a few nights at Sean's house after the night at the lava pool until Sean mentioned an abandoned house on the edge of the village. Apparently, some old farmer died a few years back and no one took the property.

They were *finally* getting around to it a few weeks later. Tommy had no idea how the time slipped by. Well, there was that one incident with the neighbor's cows, and then Jill had taken him on a picnic but forgot the blanket so they just climbed the trees and ate up there, and it had taken *days* to convince the blacksmith to craft a bell for Tommy, and—

Okay, so Tommy could see why it took so long. It wasn't entirely his fault, Sean was surprisingly complacent about all the minor crimes that Tommy was committing. In fact, just this morning Tommy had barged into the house and declared that he was going to kidnap Jimmy's cats and put them on the roof, and Sean just shrugged.

Tommy's house, and it was really just a hole in the ground, had dust settled on the chests and crafting table. The window was already fogged up.

"Welcome, big man!"

Sean coughed as he stepped inside. "How long were you living here for?"

Tommy had to think about it. It was, what February now? The mental math came to about...
"A month, I think?" Tommy said.

“You weren’t kidding when you said your bed was bad.”

Tommy snorted just looking at the mess of wood and wool he had managed to create. Why he ever fucking slept on that thing, he would never get. The floor would have been better.

They started pulling things out of Tommy’s chests, grabbing the valuables and leaving things he’d already replaced back at the village. Sean didn’t blink at Tommy’s full set of diamond armor, just passed it over and let Tommy slip it into his inventory. Besides, Sean tried to avoid talking when Tommy’s hands were busy. He didn’t really mind, but something about it irked Sean, so he didn’t push.

Tommy forgot how much he had gathered and hoarded when he first showed up. Ender, one person did not need that many invisibility potions. He wished he still had an ender chest, but he hadn’t farmed any obsidian yet, not with the risk it came with. Tommy didn’t want to be within fifty meters of a lava pool for a very, very long time. Besides, most of the shit in there he didn’t need anymore.

It wasn’t until Sean pulled the compass out from the bottom of a chest that Tommy remembered he still had it. He froze and watched as Sean ran a thumb across the engraving, tilting it so the sun caught on the shine of enchantments.

“Sorry,” he said, pushing the compass into Tommy’s hands, “I’ve just never seen something like that... sorry, I shouldn’t have looked.” Tommy forgot how uncommon the magic and riches of the SMP were in rural villages like this. Sean had probably never even touched netherite.

Tommy shook his head and held out the compass. “*It points to a lodestone,*” Tommy said, finger-spelling the unfamiliar word.

“What’s that?”

“A block, you craft it with netherite. Basically, it lets you alter a compass to point to a specific place instead of towards spawn.” Fuck, his fingers were gonna hurt in a couple hours.

Sean flipped the compass around, inspecting every inch of the purple-tinted metal. “What’s a Tubbo?”

Oh man, if Tubbo were here, Tommy would have rubbed that in his face for ages.

“A name.”

Sean took a moment. Tommy could tell he was choosing his words carefully, trying not to step over Tommy’s boundaries.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

Tommy sighed, looking at the red needle that never strayed from its target. *“Tubbo was my friend. We got... separated. Hence the compasses.”*

“He has one too?”

Tommy nodded.

“Does it lead here?”

“No, the lodestone is somewhere else.”

Sean seemed to realize that was as far as Tommy was willing to go and handed him back the compass. He was opening the chest to put it back when Sean stopped him.

“You should probably keep that.”

“*Why?*”

Sean shrugged. “Just because your past wasn’t pleasant doesn’t mean you have to get rid of it. Your memories, even the bad ones, make you who you are, and it can be good to keep a reminder.”

Well, damn. Tommy slipped the compass into his inventory without a word. It was much too early in the morning to talk about his feelings.

They grabbed the last of the things out of the chest, and Tommy broke and picked up his crafting table and furnace. He left the bed.

Sean kept up some mindless chatter as they walked back to the village, allowing Tommy to drift through his thoughts. It was odd, leaving the forest he had become so acquainted with, but it felt like a step in the right direction.

Tommy was still nervous about living so close to people again and had already scoped out the house for possible secret bunkers and such. His closest neighbor was a sweet elderly couple that had way too much knowledge about tropical fish, and just a few houses away from them were the Luter’s, Jill’s family. He would be alright.

The house also had a plot open for farming. Tommy wasn’t sure if he would actually use it yet, considering the only crop he knew how to farm were carrots, and he really didn’t want to compete with Sean. Farming was nice to get his mind off things, but Tommy knew a long day in the mines worked just as well.

Sean and Tommy approached the little cottage, laden down with all of Tommy’s things. Tommy’s eyes skated over the fogged windows and dilapidated walls, focusing instead on what he wanted it to look like. To be fair, Tommy wasn’t a builder, but he wanted to try. He wanted to make something permanent that he was proud of.

There was no door, so they made their way in and started unloading items. The sun shone through gaps in the roof, illuminating the dust floating in the air. The house had an odd air of peace about it.

The oldest buildings in the SMP were much younger than most of the village houses, and almost none of them were still standing. Tommy snorted, just thinking about an outsider's reaction to the... eccentric design of the community house.

But it was likely that the walls surrounding Tommy were older than himself, and despite the wear and tear, they were still standing.

Time passed quietly, Tommy and Sean sorting items into chests and shuffling around debris from the house.

The main room had a couple of chests and furnaces already, complete with a fireplace and table. There were two rooms that branched off and a tiny attic that made Tommy cough for hours the first time he went up.

"Do you care which room is the bedroom?" Sean asked.

Tommy jerked his head towards the closest. "*It's got a better view.*" While that was true, it also had a better pattern in the floorboards to disguise a secret entrance.

He had no idea what he'd do with the other room. Tommy never really developed any hobbies in the SMP other than starting revolutions or arson, neither of which he was keen to pick up again.

Maybe he could make a mini-Church Prime shrine for shits and giggles. Someone around here must know who Oogway was, right?

Sean set up the bed Tommy had been borrowing from him in the bedroom and placed down a spare chest and crafting table. It was simple, but Tommy didn't have any decorations, so it would have to do for now.

"I think you're all set, mate."

Tommy stood up and dusted off his pants. They'd made quick work of the move, thankfully. He would have to fix some of the holes in the roof before the night in case it rained and build a door, but Sean was right—they were done.

"Thanks for the help."

"Anytime, Tommy. See you around?"

Tommy nodded, and Sean headed out, most likely back to his farm to catch up on the work he'd missed. Tommy had originally planned to move on his own, but in classic Sean-style, he'd refused to let Tommy do it alone.

He grabbed a few wooden planks out of a chest and started crafting a door. Most of the house's accents were in oak wood, but considering Tommy had been living in a spruce forest, that was all he had.

Sure enough, the house looked pretty dumb once he'd placed the door, but Tommy decided that was a fight for another day. He was exhausted and ready to pass out as soon as the house was livable.

Tommy had to climb onto the roof to patch some of the holes, and he got a great view of the village while he was at it. Sure enough, Sean was working in his farm, his figure a little speck on the horizon. The village was bustling, the usual rush to get done the day's work before the sun set.

It reminded him entirely and nothing of L'manburg. Sure, they were both places he called home, and at the surface, they were both made of houses and roads. But there was something here that L'manburg was always missing, and Tommy just couldn't put his finger on it.

Most of the people here were nice, and unusually nice at that. You wouldn't catch anyone in the SMP helping someone they didn't know well enough. Maybe it was because one of L'manburg's founders threw his compatriots under the bus to further his status. Maybe it was because the people that tried to be nice always got the short end of the stick.

This little unnamed village felt like a haven in a bubble, isolated from the horrors of the world, and Tommy didn't want it to pop.

The sun started to disappear behind the treeline, and Tommy finished up patching the roof just before the mobs spawned. He slipped back inside, closed his new mismatching door, and headed into his new bedroom.

It would be nice, eventually. Once he cleaned the windows and gave everything a fresh layer of paint, or just replaced the walls completely. But for the first time since Tommy dug a little space into a hill, he felt like it could be somewhere to live in for a while.

His bed was comfortable, and Tommy easily slipped into sleep.

-

The village is on fire. What's left of it, at least, after the endless barrage of TNT. Tommy stands at the edge of it all, helpless to stop the chaos.

He can't move or scream for help. He can't even use his hands.

In one second, Tommy is alone, and in the next, Dream is there. Reality shifts to accommodate him, and Tommy realizes that something is very, very wrong.

“You know,” Dream started, his tone light and casually like he hadn’t just murdered a whole village, “it took me longer to find you than I expected.”

Tommy could say nothing.

The sound of snapping reached their ears, and Tommy watched in horror as a house collapsed. No matter how many times he had watched his homes burn in front of him, he always managed to forget how *loud* fire was. The roar surrounded him, just as suffocating as the smoke.

“Your little trip to the Nether threw me off for a bit, but it didn’t matter in the end, did it?”

It feels like he’s burning again, protected from the fatal heat of the lava by a thin layer of fire resistance, except this time, the shore is too far away. Tommy won’t make it in time, and he knows it.

Burns appear on his skin, raw and open. They form in real time, and Tommy is thankful for Techno’s dramatics at the festival, because if the fireworks hadn’t covered up this damage on Tubbo’s skin, Tommy would have died trying to avenge him.

“I saw your little breakdown at the lava,” Dream teases, and Tommy is confused, because didn’t Dream just get here?

Dream rests a gentle hand on Tommy’s arm, but he still flinches. The burns don’t hurt. He knows why— Tommy had taken care of Tubbo long enough to know that deep burns fry your nerves— but it still felt wrong. Dream was hurting him, logically, he should feel pain, but he doesn’t.

“You’re lucky Sean was there. How long do you think you’ll survive without him?”

Dream's right, Tommy can see the remnants of Sean's house from here even though he shouldn't be able to. But Sean is dead, and Tommy knows this in his bones.

The hand on his arm tightens, but Tommy cannot move.

"How long until he abandons you too?"

And it's a question that Tommy's been asking himself ever since Sean offered to teach him sign language, because surely even someone as kind as Sean couldn't forgive him for everything. What would Tommy have to do to be exiled again?

Dream's fingers dig in until they hit bone, and Tommy looks down to see his skin withering. Flesh turns to black, and black turns to ash, and he watches himself disappear. Dream waves goodbye as what's left of Tommy is swept up by the wind. Somehow he is able to watch as he joins the ashes of the others swirling in the sky.

-

Tommy was halfway out of bed, still feeling weightless, before he realized where he was. The moon shone through cracks in the wall and the tinted windows, illuminating the soft edges of everything in the room.

Fucking hell.

He hadn't had a nightmare since the start of exile, probably because Tommy kept himself up until he passed out for that exact reason. But now, of course, as soon as Tommy felt slightly happy about settling down, his brain fucked him over.

Tommy grabbed the pillow and shoved it over his face with a silent groan.

Whatever, he'd deal with it tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Well, not as angsty as some of you all were preparing for, but a little spice to keep things interesting. This was a little bit of a filler chapter, but it was necessary to get to the next few events in the story. Things are really gonna start happening soon :D

Also, I discovered em dashes and my mind has been blown. Look at this funky guy! —

lost

Chapter Summary

lost - Start with the fingers of both hands together, then push away in a swooping motion and spread the fingers

Tommy had to admit, when Sean suggested a quick trip to a nearby city, he didn't think he would end up here. But, of course, he was Tommy Careful Danger Kraken Innit, and trouble followed him everywhere.

Chapter Notes

Whoops, it's been a week. Sorry about that, not sure why this took so long. Hope you enjoy anyways!

EDIT: HOLY CRAP I FORGOT TO THANK YOU ALL FOR 1000 KUDOS!!! LIKE WHAT THE HECK??? THATS CRAZY! This community shows support for artists like nothing else, just know that by reading, commenting, subbing, etc, you make a lot of people's days. Lots of love <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Three months later...

Tommy had to admit, when Sean suggested a quick trip to a nearby city, he didn't think he would end up here. But, of course, he was Tommy Careful Danger Kraken Innit, and trouble followed him everywhere.

This time, trouble came in the form of three people that had cornered him in an alleyway with knives. Tommy would have laughed if he wasn't so scared— threatening to stab people in alley's was *his* thing.

Tommy gave them a little wave while simultaneously looking for an exit route, but he'd managed to wander into a perfect spot for a mugging. Great.

"If you do what we say, this will go a lot easier," one of them said, voice low and gravelly.

Tommy, a street kid born and bred, knew the routine of being robbed like he knew the scars on his body. Sure, he could probably take these guys, but he had no idea if fighting would send him into a dangerous panic. Or, even worse, he'd end up killing someone.

So, he turned out his pockets and threw his bag onto the ground. It barely had any emeralds left after a day of shopping, but he knew the muggers would manage to sell the goods he'd gotten easily. After all, Tommy had stolen many, many things in his life.

One of the men picked up the bag with a chuckle. "Thanks for the gift, but that's not what we're here for."

Tommy froze.

Fuck. Fucking fuck.

Either they were sent from Dream, which Tommy highly doubted, the green bitch liked to do his own dirty work, or they were trying to traffic him.

With the rise in popularity of anarchy servers in the past few years, places like 2b2t and Constantiam needed a constant influx of slaves to keep the economy functioning. Thankfully, Tommy had managed to meet Wilbur right before all that, but TimeDeo told him stories about hunters scouring cities for weak players. Ender-dammit, Tommy couldn't believe he had been so stupid and forgot about the risks.

The diamond armor sat heavily in Tommy's armor, and his fingers itched to grab his sword, but he had to try and resolve this peacefully first. He did not want to meet back up with Sean covered in blood and most likely panicked out of his mind.

Tommy held his hands out in a clear *stop* motion, but they kept creeping closer. There was no way those assholes knew sign language, but Tommy tried anyway.

“Lads, I wouldn’t do this.”

The men seemed to take his motions for panicking and rushed.

Tommy’s instincts took over, and he threw his armor on as quickly. A knife jammed into his chestplate a second after it was equipped. In one fluid motion, Tommy pulled out his sword and smacked the flat of the blade against one of their chests.

“Fuck!” The main cried out, and he fell to the ground, clutching his ribs. The other two stepped out of reach of Tommy.

It was too dark to see their faces, but Tommy would bet money they were shitting their pants.

“What the fuck, man! Are you insane?”

Maybe, Tommy thought, would it make much difference?

They helped the injured man to his feet and dashed out of the alley as fast as they could, dropping Tommy’s bag as they went. Well, at least he had that.

Tommy never had an enemy give up so easily. Battles were fought until so much blood was shed that there wasn’t enough to keep the hearts beating of one side. Running away wasn’t an option, and the only time he’d seen someone surrender was during the fight against Manburg. Fucking Dream and his closed-door deals with Schlatt.

But now his fingers itched for a fight and couldn't let go of his sword.

Tommy had heard stories about the voices in Techno's head, the ones that called for blood and violence, the ones that never let him sleep. Something inside of him was calling for the same thing, but there were no voices. It was just *Tommy*, just him and his brain that craved chaos.

Sean was waiting for him. "*Meet me at the Moonflower Inn at sundown,*" he'd said. And Tommy had smiled and waved him goodbye to explore the city. It was supposed to be a breath of fresh air, a break from the monotony of village life— something to soothe the itch that had been building in Tommy for weeks.

But here he stood, sword in hand, and wanting nothing more than to drive it through someone's rib cage.

How had he ever convinced himself he could live peacefully?

Wilbur had done his job as a general too well, had crafted Tommy into a soldier so young he didn't know any way else to live.

Tommy held his sword at his side and headed into the maze of alleyways in the opposite direction of the inn. With his other hand, he moved his bandana from around his neck to on his face.

Cities like this were crawling with crime, you just had to know where to look. It was as if Tommy was eight again and looking for a hole in the wall to sleep in so patrols wouldn't find him and send him back to the orphanage, or he was thirteen and running from a merchant who sold overpriced potatoes that he'd just stolen.

Tommy's mind was unusually clear. Most mornings started with a struggle to fight through the fog that constantly built in his mind, but he felt more like himself than he had in months. Tommy loved it, and that terrified him.

Fuck, he was so scared, because he hadn't lost control of his body like this in weeks, not since the lava pool, and Tommy wanted this just as much as he'd wanted that.

“Oi, get the fuck out of here and stop harassing my barkeep!” A voice yelled.

Tommy turned the corner, crouching in the shadows. At the end of the alley, three people stood in front of the entrance to what looked like a dimly lit bar. One had her back to the door and was shouting at the other two.

One of the pair spoke up, “But he’s such a pretty thing, isn’t he? We just wanted to make sure he had a nice night.”

The moonlight caught on the edge of a knife that the bar-owner pulled out. “Last warning. Leave or I will gut you.”

Bingo.

Tommy dashed out of his hiding spot, turned his shoulder, and slammed into one of the creeps. He sensed movement on his right as the other two started scuffling as well.

To the guy’s credit, he recovered quickly and shot to his feet, axe in hand, but Tommy was quicker. Tommy was always quicker.

He swung his sword, aiming the blade so it cut into the axe at its weak point— where the metal met the wood. Unfortunately, the handle was thick enough that it only cracked. *Dark oak*, Tommy’s mind supplied. He gritted his teeth and focused.

The man grunted, and Tommy could tell from just one poorly aimed swing that the axe was way too heavy for him. Either it was just for show or he’d been slacking on workouts. Whatever the case, it was almost a joke to watch him use the thing.

Tommy waited for an opening and jabbed the point of his sword into the man's hand, forcing him to drop the axe. Ender, this was too easy. He dropped his weapon as well, watching it clatter on the cobble for a second before rejoining the fight.

Hand-to-hand combat was never Tommy's specialty, especially because no one around him bothered with it. In fact, Techno once compared the fighters in a boxing match to monkey's and promptly left. *Dickhead*. But neither was Wilbur or Tubbo, or Deo, or anyone else he'd met, except for Dream.

Tommy couldn't take a weaponless Dream even with a diamond sword if he tried, so it was no surprise he was useless in exile.

His fist slammed into the man's face, right on target. Tommy already felt the slick of blood on his hands even if he couldn't see it in the dim alleyway. He grinned.

There were books on anything you could dream of, Tommy learned, and their library was well stocked for a small town. After he did a favor for the librarian— gathering ink sacs, nothing special— they let him take a book. To Tommy's wonder, they had a guide to hand-to-hand combat.

So during the nights where the nightmares were too much, or Tommy had energy thrumming just centimeters under his skin, he trained. It was easy to steal Sean's scarecrow and turn it into a dummy, he turned a blind eye to practically anything Tommy did these days, not that he actually caught him that much.

Delightfully, his opponent was much better without an axe. The man was tall, not as tall as Tommy, but he had a much stockier build. He was quick, too.

A feint threw Tommy off, and he caught a slug to the stomach. The impact *burned* , but Tommy caught his breath quickly and returned a punch that grazed off the man's jaw. His knuckles felt like they were on fire, the already-forming bruise radiated pain, and Tommy relished in it. Ender, he wanted more.

Tommy fought dirtier, letting himself take punches that he could dodge in order to give more aggressive attacks of his own. He worked in a few footwork moves that he learned from swordplay, managing to knock the stranger off his feet.

Without thinking, Tommy grabbed a knife out of its sheath on his leg and turned it around. His hands dug into the blade, but he couldn't feel it anymore. It didn't matter. Tommy rammed the hilt into the man's face, breaking his nose. He did it again, drinking in the cry of pain that came from under him.

And again. And again. And again. And finally, Tommy tossed the knife into the air and caught it the proper way 'round, slicing downwards and pausing just before he cut into the flesh below him.

He wanted to see the man's eyes, memorize the look of terror before Tommy slit his throat, but they were closed. Fuck, he had beat him too much. He tested the pressure of his knife on the man's neck, debating whether or not it would be worth it to wait or just end it all now. Ender, it would be so easy to—

“Dude, you good?”

The woman from earlier, the bar-owner, was standing just in Tommy's peripheral vision. He couldn't see the other creep, so he must have run off or she took care of him. He didn't really care.

“As much that guy fucking sucked, I probably wouldn't kill him for it.” Tommy internally snorted. It didn't sound like she would mind if he did.

His hands were sticky. Tommy was hit with the overwhelming urge to scrub them clean and had to take a moment to breathe from the physical reaction. He just gripped the knife harder.

The woman worked her way into his vision, stepping lightly on the stones. She was a fighter too, Tommy could tell, either that or a dancer, and there wasn't much difference at the end of the day.

She frowned, looking at the man's face. "You know, I think you got him," she said.

Tommy glanced down and almost gagged. Fucking hell, he'd practically bashed the creep's nose into his skull. Tommy dropped the knife like he'd been shocked— Ender, the guy might already be dead from blunt force trauma.

Fuck, he was hyperventilating. Tommy hadn't freaked out like this since the Nether, and he wasn't happy to repeat that experience. Sean liked to call them "panic attacks", but Tommy preferred "bitch-ass stupid fucking brain of his making a big fucking deal out of fuck-all." It helped.

Metal clattered in front of his face, startling Tommy. Instinctively, he reached to his belt for his sword, but it— oh, that's what hit the ground.

The woman was standing over him, arms crossed. "Dude, you are not about to have an anxiety attack in this grungy alley." She offered him a hand.

Tommy grabbed his sword with one hand and gave her the other. He had no idea what he was doing, honestly, but shock drove him to follow her instructions. She was right, too, he really didn't want to pass out here.

The woman led him into a bar, and he was hit with an overwhelming amount of sound at once. Tommy clapped his hands over his ears and grit his teeth. She didn't seem to notice, just maneuvered her way through the crowd and past a door in the back. Tommy followed.

She closed the door behind them, cutting off most of the sound and dulling the rest. Tommy relaxed just slightly and looked around.

It was just a normal looking back-room at a bar, barrels covering the floor and bottles on top of them. Tommy had seen nicer, but he'd also seen worse, so he had no objections when the woman motions for him to sit on a barrel and stay.

She came back with a few bandages in her hands and a singular health potion.

“Sorry it isn’t regen, I’ve never been one to care for scars. Fix yourself up.” She tossed him the bottle, and Tommy caught it despite the blood still coating his hands. He set the bottle down and held them out.

The woman snapped her fingers. “Ah, sorry about that.” She grabbed a water bottle and poured it out, rinsing his hands of most of the blood. What was left was his own, still steadily leaking out from the cuts on his hands.

Tommy wrapped his hands in the bandages. The bar-owner stayed silent the whole time, leaning on a wall and simply staring. Her gaze roamed all over Tommy, but she seemed indifferent about his appearance and quite open about the staring, and Tommy realized he didn’t really mind.

“What’s your name?” he signed before undoing his bandana and downing the health potion. Fuck, he forgot how bad those tasted after downing them repeatedly. They used to remind him of hard candy, but now the smell of gunpowder seemed to linger on his tongue as well.

The woman frowned. “Sorry dude, I don’t know sign language. I’ve got a book if you can write.”

Tommy nodded and took the book and pen she grabbed off a cluttered table.

What’s your name?

She snapped again. “Shit, sorry. I’m Misuko, and this is my bar!” Her arms waved around in a grand gesture that obviously mocked the state of the place.

Tommy touched the pen to the paper and realized he didn't know what to say. What do you even ask in a situation like this?

Misuko seemed to notice his hesitation. "You want a drink?"

Tommy shuddered, remembering the stink of alcohol on Schlatt's corpse in the cramped caravan. Tubbo's office reeked of it for weeks until they could air it out properly.

No thanks. What happened to the other guy?

"He ran off after I kicked him in the balls," she snorted, "Pussy."

In that moment, Tommy wanted nothing more than to lock Misuko and Badboyhalo in a room together and record the whole thing. It would've been *glorious*.

And my guy?

She knew what he was asking. "He had a pulse when we left, no idea if it'll stay."

Tommy nodded slowly, taking in the info.

"That wasn't your first rodeo, was it?" Misuko asked.

Tommy quirked an eyebrow.

"Oh don't play dumb. You've killed someone before, haven't you?"

Yes.

“Canon life?”

Tommy thought of Jack. He thought of Tubbo and Wilbur— he practically killed them, stood by while the damage was done. He should say no.

Tommy nodded.

Misuko hummed, looking him over again. “So why the panic attack? And don’t think I missed the part where you threw away your sword to beat him into a fucking pulp.”

Well, Tommy thought she could have put it a bit more delicately.

It’s been a while , he wrote, because that was the best he could summarize the crazy fuck-fest the last few months had been.

“That’s what people say about playing guitar or speaking a foregin language or some shit. You don’t just lose your nerve cause you haven’t stabbed someone in a bit.”

Tommy was starting to realize that Misuko really didn’t like to sugar-coat her words.

I lost a war. (He hadn’t, really, but it was easier to explain) *The other guy wasn’t very nice. Now I’m here.*

“Don’t forget the pulp-beating part.”

I don’t know. I couldn’t— not.

Misuko popped open a bottle of something and took a swig. “I used to be married.”

Tommy almost dropped the book. *What?*

“Yeah, I know. Me? Not very bride-like. But I was, and he sounds a lot like your guy— not nice. So I left and moved here. Couldn’t handle anything— loud noises, weapons, yelling, frying pans, etcetera. Anyways, the next time a guy hit on me, I almost ripped his eye out.”

Okay?

“My point is that after you deal with dickheads like we did, you’re on one side of the scale. Scared, jumpy, traumatized, all that shit. And at some point, you gotta swing to the other side and let that part of yourself heal too.” Misuko punctuated her speech with another swig.

Huh.

“You gotta remember, though, no matter what you do, ‘revenge’ isn’t gonna fix anything. That’s something you have to do yourself. But if you’re in the business of letting off steam and fitting back into your own boots again, who’s to say you can’t beat up a few people that probably deserve it?”

Is that what you did?

“Nah,” Misuko shook her head, “I opened up the bar. Channeled my energy into that, but, I would be lying if that didn’t lead to me angrily dumping drunk people in dark alleyways.”

Tommy grinned. Misuko wasn’t particularly tall, but he could definitely picture her dragging bodies around with ease.

What happened to your husband?

She snapped her fingers again, and this time Tommy noticed her flicking her thumbnail across the pads of her other fingers while she talked.

“Dunno. He’s miles away, and I haven’t seen him since.”

Tommy thought about Dream and the ever-present potential for him to show up and fuck up his life again. *Would you kill him if you did?*

Misuko took a moment to think. “Maybe. I’d definitely throw a punch. Kill him, though? He’s got two lives left, so I might take one, eye for an eye sorta thing, you know? But I don’t think I’d permadeath him.”

He took one of your lives?

“Yup. He was a right bastard.” She didn’t elaborate.

My guy took two of mine, almost a third.

Misuko gave him another once-over. “Would you kill him?”

Well. It wasn’t like Tommy hadn’t thought about it. He’d dreamed about it, in fact, fantasized about putting his sword through Dream’s chest over and over until he couldn’t respawn. But they were just dreams. Tommy was realistic enough to know he’d never get a chance to take a life of Dream’s without the whole server behind him, and that wasn’t possible anymore.

I don’t know.

“Well, maybe you will, eventually.” Misuko raised her bottle up. “Here’s to us then.”

Tommy lifted the empty potion bottle in a mock toast.

Misuko glanced at a clock on the wall. “If you’ve got somewhere to go, you might wanna start heading there, considering it’s midnight, but if you need a place to stay, I’ve got a room upstairs.”

Shit. *I have a friend waiting for me.*

“You might wanna get going then, dude.”

Tommy scribbled his name and a “thank you” quickly in the book, handed it to Misuko, and dashed out the door. On his way out, he took note of the bar’s name. *Valcluse’s Viper*.

There was no body on the cobble outside, so Tommy hoped the man had recovered enough to flee the scene. He tried not think about it.

Retracing his steps was difficult in the low light, but Tommy eventually managed to stumble his way onto a main road that he recognized.

The Moonflower Inn was a quaint building tucked in between a bank and a florist and decorated with white flowers and vines across the front. It was peaceful and quiet, but it did nothing to soothe the nerves that were now building in Tommy’s stomach.

He pushed the door open and stepped inside. The dining room was practically empty except for a tired hostess and a familiar man anxiously pacing the floor.

A bell tinkled as he entered, and Sean’s head shot up to meet Tommy’s gaze.

“Oh my Ender, you’re okay.” Sean was already crossing the room. “Where were you?”

Before Tommy could answer, Sean had wrapped him in a hug. He tried to avoid flinching from the pain in his ribs, but it seemed Sean was too caught up in his emotions to notice.

Tommy tapped Sean’s shoulder, a little overwhelmed, and he broke the hug.

“I got lost, sorry.”

“It’s alright, mate, let’s just get home.”

Sean led him out of the inn, thanking the hostess as they left. They hopped on their horses, and Tommy tried to hide the fact that his hands were wrapped in bandages and the sword in his scabbard was covered in blood.

Chapter End Notes

Don't worry, that's not the last we see of Misuko, and Tommy's not done beating people up. I've been researching swordplay and stuff like that for this, and it's actually quite interesting to learn about.

You can thank Start a Riot and The Prowler from Into the Spiderverse and The Winter Soldier from the OST for the action bits in these. Also, I keep switching music genres every two weeks for whatever reason, and this chapter is brought to you by classic rock (which is a new one for me).

See ya!

blood

Chapter Summary

blood - One hand with the index finger pointing away from the body, the other hand sliding on top in the same direction

Sean snorted. “It’s always all or nothing with you, isn’t it. There’s a large gap between healthy and dead, you know.”

Again, Tommy waved him off. He was in the peak of shape, working on the house and training every single day. He was even eating properly again, and not just the bare minimum, actual, proper meals three times a day. It was odd, setting a routine after so long of uncertainty, but Tommy enjoyed it. He felt great.

Chapter Notes

I don't know how or why this is so long. Like actually, how did that happen? Whoops, I guess?

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Twenty days later...

The spring sun was gentle, but Tommy was still sweating from the heat. It was midday, and he had been on top of his roof for hours. Sean was similarly exhausted, but he was covered from head to toe in clothes to avoid getting sunburnt. Tommy privately thought he was a pussy.

Tommy took a swig of water from a bottle. He had mixed a few drops of a regeneration potion into it, not enough to turn the water pink, but something to take the edge off of his injuries.

Thankfully, Sean hadn't noticed his hands that first night, and the few times Tommy returned to the city, he made sure to keep his wounds off his arms and legs.

"You alright, mate?" Sean asked.

Tommy waved him off. "*I'm fine.*"

"You've been unusually tired these past few days."

Well, *duh*. But Sean didn't know that he'd been riding to the city every other night to go beat people up, and Tommy wanted to keep it that way.

He put the bottle away and picked up his hammer, getting back to work on the roof. Before losing his voice, he never realized how nice it was to ignore people. If someone said something he didn't like, he could just shut up!

Unfortunately, it didn't really work on Sean.

"You don't have to work on the house every day. The world's not gonna end if you take a break."

Theoretically, Tommy knew that. But there was something driving him to finish as soon as possible, as if he stopped it would be taken away from him.

"I'm alright, some hard labor's not going to kill me."

Sean snorted. "It's always all or nothing with you, isn't it. There's a large gap between healthy and dead, you know."

Again, Tommy waved him off. He was in the peak of shape, working on the house and training every single day. He was even eating properly again, and not just the bare minimum, actual, proper meals three times a day. It was odd, setting a routine after so long of uncertainty, but Tommy enjoyed it. He felt *great*.

If you ignored the injuries, he was probably the healthiest he'd ever been, including when he first moved to the SMP. Besides, Tommy was a good enough fighter that fighter that he only really got a few cuts and some bruises every night. Just one broken rib was a pretty good record for him.

They continued the roof, ripping up old planks with holes and rot in them and replacing them with new ones. Tommy had taken the morning to chop down some oak trees and turn them into stairs and planks.

The walls had been fixed up yesterday, cleaned of the moss and dirt coating them. Sean offered to re-do them with some terracotta, but the classic cobblestone gave Tommy a bit of comfort, so he refused. They added some logs on the corners to give it some additional support.

Most of the things inside were replaced, cleaned, or moved. Tommy could see out the windows again, and the floor was free of leaves that had piled up inside for months. He had yet to replace the door with something oak. At this point, Tommy was close to saying "fuck it" and leaving it.

Tommy kept his hands busy for the rest of the day until the sun finally started to set.

"I'm going to call it a day. Are you farming tomorrow?"

Sean shrugged. "There's not much to do at this point in the harvest. I might stop by and help for a bit."

"Sounds good. Sleep well!" Tommy mock-saluted and hopped off the roof into a little pool of water he'd set up for that exact purpose.

“Stop jumping off tall things! You’re going to give me a heart-attack!”

Tommy internally laughed and slipped inside. He flipped off his stupid door while he was at it, cause why not?

His most recent secret project was sitting on the table covered in wood chippings and sawdust. Tommy picked it up, brushing off the debris and inspecting it. He had made a mask for his night time “hobby” as Misuko liked to call it.

A raccoon’s face stared back at him, carved out of the best spruce wood Tommy could find. It was soft enough for his simple knife to cut through, unlike the oak he’d tried for an hour until he practically sliced his finger off.

Sean had stopped by before he could finish, so Tommy sat down and got back to work. All that was left was to carve out the curve of the ears and dye it.

Tommy had never carved before this, but it was calm and enjoyable, and he wanted to try it again after the mask. Maybe make Sean a little wooden carrot for shits and giggles?

Time slipped away like it always did, and soon enough Tommy was looking at a complete mask fit for his face. He grabbed a few ink sacs and bones from his chests and grinded them both into dye, black and white.

He hadn’t made any brushes, so Tommy dipped his hands into the dye instead. Thankfully, raccoons stuck to a basic color scheme.

Once he finished, Tommy was about to wash his hands off in the cauldron before he got an idea. He glanced at his reflection in the window and smeared what was left of the black dye under his eyes and over his eyelids. Then, he slipped the mask on and tied the leather straps.

The effect was pretty fucking cool. Most of Tommy's features were covered, and his eyes were completely disguised by the paint and blended into the mask. Ender, if he saw himself peeking out from behind a corner he'd shit himself.

Misuko had come up with the idea the other night. "You're like a little raccoon, you know, crawling around the city looking for trash."

Tommy had punched her on the arm. Hard. But as he tried to sleep that night, he remembered Wilbur saying something similar after Tommy showed him around the sewers he'd made.

"I think this has surpassed gremlin energy and gone fully animalistic, Tommy," he'd said, *"Are you sure you aren't a hybrid?"* Wilbur had then proceeded to shove his hands in Tommy's hair and pretend to look for ears for way too long, cackling like crazy.

"You gonna grow a little tail, make a burrow? You'd make a great groundhog—ooo, are you a little rat boy, Tommy?" Tommy distinctly remembered disliking that.

"No, you know what? I've decided it, you're a raccoon. You keep going around the SMP and stealing shit and then you retreat to your little holes and hide."

So, Tommy started carving a mask instead of sleeping.

He definitely wasn't a hybrid, otherwise his traits would have shown up years ago when he started puberty, or from birth, like Fundy and Techno. Besides, he'd checked his records at the orphanage when he was six, and both his parents were marked as human.

It used to annoy him back at the SMP, especially when Tubbo's horns grew long enough to poke past his hair. Ender, it seemed like more and more hybrids showed up the longer Tommy was there—Phil, Puffy, Ant. Tommy had never even seen an enderman hybrid before Ranboo, much less whatever weird fusion he was.

Wilbur was human despite his dad having huge ass wings, and Tommy was thankful for it every day. Before his death, it was always Wilbur and Tommy against the world, no matter what weird magic was thrown at them.

And then Wilbur died, Tubbo started looking like Schlatt more and more every day, and Dream exiled Tommy— and who even know what the *fuck* that green bitch was.

Tommy was human, but he wasn't weak, and he would show everyone that doubted how dangerous he could be.

He kept his hands dirty and went into his bedroom. Diamond armor, enchanted to the max, a sword to match, potions, gapples, bandages, food, water, anything he would need in combat all tucked away in the chest under the floor. Eventually he'd expand it into a full room, but the actual house needed to be finished first.

Tommy ached to get a set of netherite. Diamond was heavy and clunky, but netherite was much easier to forge into something inconspicuous and light. In fact, he could probably buy a cloak to throw over a set and practically blend into the night. But netherite was in the nether, and somehow Tommy was much more comfortable sticking a sword in a man's stomach than simply standing near lava.

Whatever. He'd make the trip eventually, and diamond was good enough against the simple criminals he ran into. Organized crime was something reserved for larger cities— capitals of empires and kingdoms that Tommy wanted nothing to do with.

He strapped on the armor and shoved the items into his inventory. The mask on his face felt *right*.

It was already dark when Tommy stepped outside, Sean long gone. He snuck into the village and untied one of the horses at the stable. He had borrowed Egan's for the original trip but felt bad about tiring it out every night, so he just chose at random. No one left the village at night, too scared of the mobs, so Tommy didn't feel guilty.

He'd been trying to pay them all back in secret anyway. No one in the village liked to use emeralds for most things, preferring to save those for outsiders. Instead, people paid in favors. So, Tommy did what he could. The people down the street that had been complaining about their cracked window? Fixed mysteriously overnight. His elderly neighbors talked about how they were sometimes too tired to cook— a pumpkin pie and a few of Tommy's favorites, golden carrots, appeared on their table the next day. He was already looking into carving a walking stick for the old soldier on the other side of town.

His horse tonight was a dark chestnut, calm and quiet when Tommy hopped on. It was easy to slip past most of the mobs, the skeletons too slow to fire and the others too dumb to even land a hit.

The city was a long ways away, so Tommy pushed the horse to a sprint and buckled down. It would have plenty of time to rest while he was fighting and the whole of the early morning to sleep. If Tommy could do it, so could they.

He slowed to a trot once inside the city borders and made his way to Vaocluse's Viper. As always, there was an empty stall for Tommy to put the horse in and a key to the back door hidden in a loose rock in the wall.

The door unlocked, Tommy put the key on the table and glanced around the room. It was empty— Misuko must have actually been doing her job for once. Instead, a familiar book rested on a stool.

Have fun stabbing shit, cowboy, it read. Tommy grinned. He'd have to make time to hang out with her afterwards, let her poke fun at his mask for a few.

For now, it was time to do as she said— stab shit.

He grabbed the key again, slipped out, and locked the door behind him. Tommy unsheathed his sword and set off down the street.

After five or six nights here— Ender, had he really lost count? Anyways, after a couple nights making his way through the complex system of alleyways and tight streets, Tommy

had memorized most of them. He already knew the hotspots and had staked out a couple with potential to become one.

His experience on the streets was unimaginably helpful. All Tommy had to do was let himself slip back into that mindset from a few years ago and follow his feet.

He'd met Tubbo at a place like this, after all.

To most visitors, Hypixel was a shiny beacon of what a tournament server could be— the pinnacle of competitive experience. To those that actually spent time there, even living there permanently, the glitz and glam washed off pretty quickly.

Tommy always preferred the nomadic lifestyle when he was younger, jumping from server to server when he got bored or chased out. Hypixel was a refuge and a pipe dream. Everyone dreamed about being the next big name like TapL or Technoblade, and when they were tired after hours of pointless fighting, they had to find somewhere to sleep.

The server admins must have known about the little camps that popped up in hidden nooks and buildings, but they never did anything about them, and so the homeless congregated where they could.

Tommy had just finished fighting— he never actually expected to get big, but life was *boring*, and punching people off floating islands was actually pretty fun when you didn't care about it. He passed a kid on his way into a tunnel that led to a hang-out and caught a piece of his conversation.

He was talking to his camera, narrating the experience like most of the people who uploaded their perspective in hopes of fame, but he was making stupid jokes and apparently planning pranks instead of battle strategy.

“You know, I think we might be able to scam some people today, rob a couple bitches.”

Tommy snorted without thinking about it, and the kid turned around.

“Sorry,” Tommy said, “I was just thinking about you dressing up in a suit, except you’re freakishly short so the arms and legs would be way too long, and you’d look like an idiot.”

The kid put his hands on his hips. “As if you’d be better. Your hair looks like it doesn’t know what a brush is, and I think you might have more dirt than skin on you.”

“Fuck off.” Tommy grinned. “I’m Tommy.”

“Tubbo.”

And Tommy tagged along, holding his camera for a better angle, and when Tubbo actually got around to “fighting”, Tommy shouted curses at him from the empty stands.

So Tommy knew exactly where to look for the little tunnels and cracks for people to slip through, and in places like this, people tended to prey on those less fortunate.

Sure enough, Tommy crawled under a slightly suspicious trapdoor and found himself in between two tall buildings where the walls didn’t quite meet.

Most of the people around were asleep, curled up on the cold ground. A few stood, just gazing at the stars or smoking. Tommy wrinkled his nose, reminded of Wilbur’s bad habit from Pogtopia, but pushed on. Some people glanced at him considering his armor and mask, but most minded their business and let him pass.

The space widened eventually, leading to a fairly large space that looked well-lived. Trash coated the ground that wasn’t being used as a bed, and campfires with blocks over them to catch the smoke littered the area.

More people were awake here, trading Ender knows what between coat pockets and exchanging the latest of news from the streets. Tommy kept his eyes open, looking for wandering hands and gazes held too long.

Only moments later, he watched as a man pretended to kneel by a campfire and warm up, instead slipping his fingers into the jacket of a sleeping person and pulling something out. The fire caught a glint of metal for a split second, and Tommy was on the move.

He caught the man's chest with his forearm and pushed him up against the nearest wall. The commotion quickly caught the attention of everyone else, but the streets were every man for himself, and the thief had no one come to his defense.

"What the fuck? Get off me, man!" The man tried to push Tommy away, but Tommy quickly angled his sword so that the tip rested below his sternum, pointing up. Any movement and it'd go through.

Tommy tapped his hand and made a motion for him to open it.

The man's breathing was quickly accelerating. "Get your fucking sword away from me!"

Another tap.

The thief obeyed. Cupped in his palm were a few coins, barely anything to most, but probably a hard day's work of labor or begging for the person he took them from.

By this point, the person he'd stolen from was awake and had moved a few feet away from the fight. Tommy released the man and walked over.

The person stuck their hand in their pocket, and after finding nothing, obviously, they stuck them out for Tommy to drop the coins into.

The thief had already fled, but Tommy knew that would happen the second he let him out of his sight. It didn't matter, really. No point in beating someone up over a few coins. The good fights would come later, when the moon was barely lowering in the sky and anyone with good intentions was asleep.

Tommy turned to the crowd that had formed. He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and a pen. Barely anyone knew sign language, and the ones that did only knew the basics, so he'd had to write any of his messages for them to get across. It was annoying, but he managed.

He scribbled a few words down, making them legible and clear for those that had trouble with reading. Then, in a fluid motion, Tommy pulled out his bow, held the paper above his head, dropped it, and fired.

The dulled arrow caught the paper and pinned it to the wall behind the crowd. A few people screamed, but the rest turned to look at the message Tommy had left them. He took the opportunity to scale the opposite wall and perch on the roof.

Stop fucking stealing from each other. I'm watching.

It was ominous, and a little pompous for Tommy's taste, but Misuko had recommended he make a name for himself. Reputation policed just as well as presence.

Tommy made his way across a couple of rooftops before jumping off and restarting his patrol.

The night went on, and Tommy broke up a couple of fights and minor thefts across the city. The only punch he'd managed to throw was towards a heavily drunk man that got a little too handsy with a woman. There wasn't any force behind it, and Tommy was itching for more.

Tommy turned onto a new street, and all his nerves seemed to light up at once. Only instinct kept him walking like normal, but he was now scanning everything around him with an eagle's eye. It was an odd place for a serious crime—the road was fairly open and near some fancy shops, but Tommy never ignored a weird feeling.

Sure enough, a few figures stepped out from behind some posts, weapons in hand. They seemed to be headed for Tommy, surprisingly. Most people didn't mess with him when his armor was on.

"We've heard about you," one of them called.

Tommy almost froze. Were they talking about *Tommy* Tommy, the one that ran away from Dream months ago, or were they talking about the person that stalked their streets at night? He adjusted his grip on his sword anyway.

"You think you can beat up a couple 'a people and make the world a better place, huh? Hate to break it to you, but that's not how this works." The figures, all four of them, advanced.

Tommy grinned. Fucking hell, they thought he was here for the good of the people or some shit. He knew better than anyone how unfair and evil the world could be, and boy had he been waiting to get his hands dirty in it.

He didn't let them get in another word of their stupid fucking villain monologue. Tommy slammed the hilt of his sword into the far left's head. His helmet crumpled— simple iron, no enchantments. One down.

The others weren't so easy. They fell into a defensive formation, swords and axes ready to swing. Tommy could see the glint of diamond on one, the person who'd been speaking. Ender, even these little cockroaches needed a leader, didn't they?

The other two in iron ran at Tommy, and the diamond prick stepped back and pulled out a bow. Fuck, couldn't they act like the idiots in movies that fought one by one?

Tommy caught the first strike on the edge of his sword, letting his dominant foot fall back in order to take the weight. An arrow sliced through the air by his ear. The two melee fighters timed their hits, axe first, then sword. Tommy dodged or blocked them all. Axe. Sword. Axe. Sword.

It only took a few moments for Tommy to analyze their form and attacks before he spotted an opening. The sword fighter was too tense and leaned too far forward when he lunged. Beginner's mistake. Techno had beat that out of him the day after his arrival to Pogtopia.

The next time the sword swung, Tommy blocked it with his own and held his ground. His opponent moved too far forward, unbalanced by Tommy's lack of movement, and Tommy used that to his advantage.

He curled his left hand around the person's sword arm, twisting his arm so it was pinned between Tommy's back and the crook of his elbow. They were almost chest to chest, and Tommy was behind, so the person with the axe couldn't do anything without hurting his ally.

Before the swordsman had time to react, Tommy took a step back but held his grip on their arm. This forced them to bend backwards, exposing their abdomen from under their chestplate. Tommy slid his blade, the fire aspect on his sword cauterizing the wound immediately. The person likely wouldn't die, but it would take weeks for them to recover and lots of health potions. A warning, not an execution.

Besides, Tommy didn't need to kill to satiate his bloodlust. The feeling of his sword ripping through skin and organs and the immediate rush of blood afterwards was plenty.

An arrow lodged itself in Tommy's calf, forcing him to drop the body of the person he'd just stabbed and focus on the next.

The leader was already notching another arrow. Tommy could hear the twang of the string being pulled, so he dashed to the side. Something whistled above his head.

The fighter with the axe rushed him again, apparently confident he could take Tommy down even without his buddy. Tommy blocked his hits, but each made him take a step backwards. Axes were difficult to work with, and if the person behind them could put enough force into the swing, their damage could be devastational.

He sidestepped attacks instead of taking them head-on, glancing blows off the side of his sword. Tommy's opponent seemed more confident now, and another arrow flew by. He tensed his jaw.

The arrow in his leg was starting to ache, and Tommy could feel his blood under his boots, creating a dangerous environment for footwork. He spun around, dancing under the next swing, and positioned himself so that the axe fighter was standing in the pool instead.

The archer was between the two of them, so in the second he couldn't fire an arrow, Tommy lunged.

Startled, his opponent tried another attack, but it was weak and poorly aimed, and Tommy just ducked under it. Before they could attack, Tommy slammed into them with his shoulder and knocked them to the ground.

Momentum. That's what Techno had yelled at him, punctuating every hit with a yell. *Use their momentum against them. You're small, you'll never win a fight with brute strength. Be smarter.*

Tommy was much bulkier than he'd been back then, but habits stuck, especially when they were beat into you.

The axe hilt stopped Tommy's first swing, but he aimed the next for the fighter's face. It was just a superficial slash, maybe deep enough to do some damage to an eye, but it would only really leave a scar. However, it bled like a bitch, and Tommy knew it stung like one too.

He slammed his boot into their chest, relished in the groan the axe fighter let out, and turned his attention to the leader.

They had abandoned their bow already and had a long dagger in hand. Tommy moved closer.

"Raccoon, huh?" They asked. "Interesting choice? Any meaning behind it?"

Tommy swung, too invested in the fight to keep playing defense till his opponent messed up. He wanted a proper battle— heart racing, lungs heaving, arms dripping blood from the cuts he couldn't avoid.

Whoever he was fighting knew their way around a dagger. Tommy had never trained with one— who needs a long knife when you can have a fucking *sword* , but they were holding their own.

“Not in a chatting mood?”

Tommy pushed forward. His attacks came with more and more force, and the fighter had to keep backing up little by little.

Every hit rang out like a bell, diamond on iron, like music to Tommy's ears. He was fighting sloppily now, he knew. He didn't really care.

The tip of Tommy's sword sliced through his opponent's upper arm, and he heard their hiss over the fight's noise. He switched his tactic. Instead of brute forcing his way through their defense, he danced around like a madman, poking his sword in like a saber.

Tiny wounds opened up wherever he went. Soon, there was more blood coating the road, and Tommy could hear the rattle of pain in the pair of lungs in front of him. He wondered what they would sound like drowning in their own blood. Tommy only knew how it felt.

Eventually, Tommy's viper-like attacks were too much for the other, and they dropped to their knees. The dagger slipped out of their hands.

Tommy shoved his heel into their chest, pushing them down onto the ground.

“You know,” they wheezed, “you might have blinded a man tonight, and I think my wounds could be considered torture. Do you really think you’re doing good here?”

Ender, he was insufferable. Why did everyone think he was Prince Charming, ready to save the princess from the scary dragon. He just wanted to punch people.

Tommy dug another piece of paper out of his pocket. His hands were covered in blood, but he did his best to scrawl the message out.

I'm not a hero.

He tugged the arrow out of leg, almost hissing, the sound caught on the tip of his tongue. Poking the tip of the arrow into the paper, he shoved it down onto the leader’s chest. Their armor caught most of it, but considering their cry of pain, he definitely broke skin. Whatever. They’d be fine.

Tommy gave a jaunty wave and set down the street at a jog. His leg stung like one of Tubbo’s bitch-ass bees, and he definitely should have kept the arrow in till he could treat it, but the pain was honestly grounding.

It was almost calming. Tommy was in pain, but he could look down and see the wound, see what was hurting and figure out a way to fix it. And later, once everything had healed, when Tommy remembered the pain, he could point to the scar to prove that it was real.

Misuko’s bar looked like an oasis in the middle of a sandstorm. Tommy was dead on his feet, and *fuck* did he want something to eat.

He snuck into the backroom again, but this time Misuko was fiddling about. She glanced at Tommy when he came in.

“Did you have fun, cowboy?”

Somehow, Misuko had gotten it into her head that he had a southern American accent when they met, and even after Tommy had written “wanker” over and over, she still insisted on the stupid nickname.

He grabbed his book off the table. *Lots.*

Misuko snorted. “You sound elated. I like the mask, by the way, much better than that dingy bandana you’d been wearing.”

Tommy thought of the green scrap of fabric that was currently sitting at the bottom of his chest next to a compass.

Yeah, much better.

“I see you took my suggestion.” She had a shit-eating grin.

Oh fuck off. Do you have any food?

Misuko slid a plate over to him. It was some sort of stew, but Tommy could care less, and he dug in immediately.

“There are already rumors spreading across the city about you.”

Yeah, I got that when three dickheads came looking for me tonight.

Misuko looked surprised. “You must be really good at pissing people off.”

I've had practice, Tommy wrote.

“You should head to some other cities sometime— spread the wealth, all that. I don’t know where you live, but I’m sure there are other cities within riding distance.”

Tommy shrugged. He actually had no idea. Sean bothered with the map when they visited, and Tommy hadn’t expressed any interest in going somewhere else. Maybe he could talk to a cartographer soon.

“Has Mr. Pot-at-the-End-of-the-Rainbow found out about your hobby yet?”

Tommy had told her all about Sean the other day, ranting when his protectiveness got a bit suffocating earlier that day. Misuko had no idea about how Tommy ended up at the village, and certainly no idea about the lava pool, but she knew Sean could be a bit stuffy at times. She also relished in the fact that he was Irish and named *Sean*.

He shook his head.

Misuko glanced at the clock. “It’s almost sunrise, so if you wanna keep it that way, I suggest heading out soon.”

Tommy internally groaned. He still had half of his stew to finish, not to mention that his whole body was starting to ache, but she was right.

He grabbed a few bandages from the table and hurriedly wrapped them around his leg just to stop the blood. Misuko tossed him a health potion.

“*Thanks*,” Tommy signed. Misuko had insisted that he teach her some basics the second night Tommy showed up, but she had a horrible memory. For now, the only two she could remember were “Thanks” and “Pussy.” Good enough.

“Have fun storming the castle!” Misuko called as Tommy headed out the door. He rolled his eyes— sometimes he had no idea what she was on about.

The horse he’d borrowed seemed rested well enough, so Tommy hopped on and headed out of the city as fast as he could. Somewhere halfway home, he slipped his mask off and tucked it into his inventory.

The sun was peeking over the horizon when Tommy got back, so he unsaddled the horse as fast as possible and snuck back home.

His house was quiet and still dark in the low light, and Tommy took a moment to breathe. He shoved the ever-present thrumming at the base of his skull as far back as it would go and focused on staying calm.

Tommy had just treated his injuries, cleaned off the blood and dye, and changed into new clothes when someone knocked on his door.

He opened it up, barely limping to get there, and saw Sean standing on his doorstep.

“Morning, mate! I thought I’d stop by and help before it got hot.”

Fucking hell, Tommy was tired. He faked a smile. “*Sure, let me get ready.*”

Sean gave him a thumbs up and headed around the house to the scaffolding. Tommy closed the door, resting his forehead lightly on the stupid fucking spruce wood.

Ender, this was gonna kill him.

Some highlights of my google history for this chapter: sword fighting but it's dirty, 2017 minecraft youtubers, what kind of ducks can't fly, what animals burrow in the ground, raccoons in the wild, do I use softwood or hardwood for carving?
(shoutout to some random forum that had sub counts and levels for every Hypixel youtuber in 2017, you're a champ)

This chapter was written to the albums How to Be a Human Being by Glass Animals and Bank on the Funeral by Matt Maeson. I highly recommend you listen to The Mask - Matt Maeson, I was writing and listening to the lyrics and realized how literally it fit this chapter.

Also, if you're too shy to comment, I read all the bookmarks and laugh at some of the funny ones, so don't be scared to put some weird shit in the notes. Hope you enjoyed!

heal

Chapter Summary

heal - one fist stacked on top of the other and knocked together

In Tommy's defense, he didn't choose to fall off a building.

He'd been going every night for the past six days since those criminals targeted him in the street. Tommy had taken Misuko's advice and spread out to some other cities, but he still felt restless every day until he could ride out during the night.

Chapter Notes

My sister visited this weekend so I didn't get to write as much, sorry about that! I hope you enjoy anyways :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Seventeen days later...

In Tommy's defense, he didn't *choose* to fall off a building.

He'd been going every night for the past two weeks since those criminals targeted him in the street. Tommy had taken Misuko's advice and spread out to some other cities, but he still felt restless every day until he could ride out during the night.

When he got home, the adrenaline and racing thoughts made it hard to sleep even with the exhaustion. Not to mention that Tommy had been staying out later and later.

It was only after he started to lose the grip on his consciousness while on top of a roof that Tommy realized he hadn't slept in two days.

Sean was somewhere inside. Before the static and black took over Tommy's brain, he could only be grateful that Sean wasn't there to see him fall.

Tommy came to in his bed. The first thing he noticed was a weight on his forehead, and when a water droplet made its way down his cheek, he realized it was a wet rag.

Once he opened his eyes, Tommy saw Sean sitting by his bedside and his weird friend Colin hovering nearby.

"Oh thank Ender," Sean breathed, "you scared the crap out of me,"

Tommy waved a floppy hand around. *"I'm fine, big man."*

Sean looked like he was about to say something, but Colin spoke up. "Uh, should I go now?" He jerked his thumb towards Tommy's door.

Fuck that door, Tommy thought blandly.

"Yeah, thanks for the help, Colin."

Colin slipped out the door, obviously uncomfortable.

"Why'd you let him in?"

Sean took the rag off Tommy's head and dipped back into a bucket of water. "I had to get some help to carry you in." He rang the water out. "You're not exactly easy to lift anymore."

It was true. Months of farming, building, and fighting every day had developed what little muscle mass Tommy had to start, and puberty was *finally* starting to fill him out. Some days, when he got a second to look at himself in the reflection of a pond, Tommy didn't recognize himself.

"Just get stronger," Tommy snarked.

Sean rolled his eyes. "Any idea why you fell off your roof?"

Tommy shook his head. He didn't have an idea— he had multiple. Sean could take his pick from sheer exhaustion, the sprained leg he'd been walking, the slight concussion from last night, the bruised ribs that made it hard to breathe, or just plain old pain from all his other injuries.

"Well, it is a pretty hot day for May, maybe it's heat exhaustion?"

Tommy shrugged.

Sean replenished the rag again. "I've got some cool water on your head, but you really need to cool off, and that long sleeved shirt is not helping."

Shit. He'd been avoiding hiding his arms as much as possible to avoid any suspicion, but two nights ago someone had grabbed his wrist and bruised it heavily.

Tommy grabbed the ends of his sleeves with his fingers and shook his head.

"It has to be at least 25 degrees out there, Tommy."

"I'm not hot."

“That’s literally a symptom of heat exhaustion.”

Tommy shook his head again, refusing to elaborate.

“Is there a reason you don’t want to take off your shirt? I can get you a tank top and turn around while you change,” Sean offered.

“No thanks.”

Sean’s eyes widened. “Tommy, show me your arms.”

Fuck. He knew exactly what Sean was thinking, and even though *that* wasn’t the problem here, Tommy knew there was nothing he could say or do to make Sean back off. Besides, if he was hurting himself, Tommy wasn’t dumb enough to do it on his wrists.

That’s not what normal people think like, a little voice said.

Tommy just wanted to go to bed and forget this ever happened. But Sean was looking at him like he was going to disappear, and Tommy was too tired to fight.

He slipped his shirt off and tossed it on the end of the bed. Tommy avoided looking at his injuries most of the time, only bothering to treat them. The mix of new wounds and old scars created a picture on a canvas that Tommy wasn’t fond of. He looked anyway.

Tommy’s torso was practically mangled beyond recognition. Most of his scars were currently hidden underneath a patchwork of bruises and scabs, including a few bandages and stitched-up wounds. His fingers ghosted over the mark of fingerprints that wrapped around his arm.

“What... what happened?”

Sean was staring at him with a level of horror that Tommy hadn't seen since his suicide attempt— and fuck, did he hate that word. Tommy curled in on himself slightly.

Sean seemed at a loss for what to do. His fingers twitched every second or so like he wanted to reach out and touch, and Tommy didn't think he'd like if Sean did.

"I don't— "

Tommy turned towards the wall. If Sean was going to walk out, he'd rather not see. He'd been starting to like this village— Tommy wondered if Misuko would let him live with her if he got kicked out. Probably not. They weren't that close, just friends with a similar "hobby".

"Tommy." Sean sounded disappointed. "Look at me, please."

So Tommy did. He wondered what would have happened if he didn't. Not now, but back at the lava pool. Tommy wondered how many times over he would have died if Sean hadn't been there.

Sean rarely used sign language unless Tommy asked. He wasn't exactly fluent, and Tommy didn't mind him speaking at all, so it was an odd sight to see Sean holding his hands up.

A thumbs up placed on an open palm and pushed forward. Tommy recognized it— of course he did, it was one of the first signs that Sean taught him.

"Help."

Tommy didn't know if Sean was asking Tommy if he needed help, or asking help from Tommy, or asking Tommy to help him help, or some weird combination of them all. It didn't really matter.

Tommy broke. Not like he did the last time, seated by a pit of fiery death— not like he was broken, but as if he had to shatter a bit of himself to let the rest out.

“I’ve been riding to a city every night.” If hands could stutter, Tommy’s were. *“And I just feel so angry, so I’ve been looking for criminals and— and fighting them, but it doesn’t stop, I keep— I can’t keep doing this.”*

“Hey, hey, take a deep breath. Let’s just take a moment, alright?”

Tommy nodded. Sean leaned back in his chair and let out a side, his eyes never leaving Tommy. Tommy could see the slight shake in Sean’s hands and the shine of tears building, and he felt like utter shit.

“Sorry, I just—” Sean’s voice cracked, “I’ve never been in battle before, so it’s hard...” He trailed off.

Tommy always forgot how young Sean actually was. For a person so relaxed and full of wisdom, Tommy probably had more actual life experience. For a sickening second, Tommy wondered if Sean had ever seen someone die, and if it would have been Tommy in another universe.

Sean finally looked away and ran his hand through his hair. “I knew something was up, you’ve been so distant and tired lately, I should have said something or— or asked—”

Tommy cut him off by shaking his head. *“Not your fault. Don’t blame yourself for my stupid mistakes.”*

“I just thought you were doing better.” Sean smiled miserably.

Tommy sighed. Sean already got it into his head that all this was his fault, and Tommy was *not* going to let that stay.

“I met a friend in the city. She helped me that first time we went, and she told me that recovery involves letting the ugly side of yourself heal too. I think what she meant was that I’ve got to get worse before I can get better, and that means you’ve done nothing wrong.”

Sean was silent for a moment. “I think that’s the most profound thing I’ve ever heard you say.”

“Bitch.”

Sean smiled, but it was genuine this time, and Tommy felt a weight lifted off him.

He glanced down at his wounds again. *“Most of these are old anyways, and I’ve treated the ones that aren’t. I just fell off the roof cause I was tired.”*

“That’s not exactly reassuring,” Sean said.

Tommy shrugged.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“The old or the new ones?”

“Either.”

As always, Tommy’s gut reaction was to say no. But he had spoken to Misuko about it, albeit very little, and that went well. Besides, Tommy was tired. He was tired of carrying all of this inside of him and letting it eat away at him.

“Have you heard about the Dream SMP?”

Sean’s eyes widened. “Everybody has. Most people think it’s all rumors.”

“What do people say about it?”

“That it’s a place where cities are levelled. War, death, the whole apocalypse wrapped up into a couple hundred chunks.”

Well that was a little bit overdramatic, Tommy thought, but he nodded anyways.

“Pretty much.”

“You’ve been there?”

“I lived there—for a long time, too. Those wars you mentioned? I fought in them, started a few, ended some others.”

Tommy rested his fingers on the lump of scar tissue sitting on his abdomen. It was practically covered by bruises and newer scars, but the raised skin was more severe than anything else on his body.

“I lost my first life to the person that controls the area, Dream. My f— we were fighting for independence, and one of our members ratted us out.”

He moved his hand to the indent on his upper left chest right under his collarbone. It was a killing blow and shot for that purpose by a master bowman.

“I challenged Dream to a duel. He won— killed me with an arrow right here. I had to give him my two most prized possessions to gain independence for our nation.”

Sean was crying and had been for a while by the looks of it.

“You’re on one life?”

“Have been for a while, big man,” Tommy said.

“Is that why you left?”

Tommy frowned. *“Not exactly.”*

Sean dropped his head in his hands. “I’m going to die a very early death, and it will be your fault. Go on.”

“You remember my friend I mentioned, Tubbo?”

“The compass guy, right?”

“Long story short, me and the President got kicked out of the country when we held an election. Things went downhill pretty quickly, the Prez blew everything up and died. Tubbo took over, and then Dream ordered him to exile me.”

Tommy motioned to the array of scars on his chest. *“Dream had... free range and didn’t like me very much. So I left. And now I’m here.”*

“Why do I get the feeling you’re oversimplifying a lot of that?”

“Politics.” Tommy waved his hand. *“Very boring, thought I’d save you from the details.”*

Sean snorted. “Sure.”

Tommy grabbed his shirt and pulled it back on. His arms were sore enough to hurt when they stretched, and it definitely didn’t go unnoticed by Sean.

“You swear you aren’t seriously hurt?”

“I swear, Sean.”

“I just—” Sean cut himself off. “Alright.”

Tommy raised his eyebrows. *“Spit it out.”*

“You’ve never asked me how I know sign language.”

What?

Sean must have seen the confusion written across Tommy’s face and continued. “It’s not exactly common to know sign language. I had to learn it from somewhere.”

Hesitantly, Tommy asked, *“So how do you know sign language?”*

“I had a sister. She was born a few years after me in the village I used to live in with my parents.” Sean’s eyes wandered across the room as he spoke, as if he was drifting through memories. “Penny— she, uh, she was born blue and not breathing. She lived, thankfully, but

the cleric told us she had too many medical issues to name and would be lucky to live for more than a few years. And when she started to grow up we realized she was deaf.”

Tommy stayed silent, letting Sean collect himself and keep talking.

“So we learned sign language. The whole village did, actually. Penny thrived, she just soaked in life like a sponge, but my parents treated her like glass. Eventually, she got tired of telling them every time she felt sick or scraped her knee.”

Sean was crying again, living up to his self-proclaimed title of ‘crybaby’. He sniffed and wiped away the falling tears with his sleeve.

“Sorry, it’s just— she was my best friend, you know?”

And Ender, did Tommy know.

The war for Manburg had been chaos. Not the kind of chaos you’d find on a busy street or particularly rowdy party, but actual, terrifying chaos. Every attack, explosion, and betrayal left Tommy reeling, and before he could pick himself up, the next one hit.

When Wilbur died, it felt like the world should have stopped. Instead, the nation he formed built over the site of his death and did their best to erase the history. Tommy never even saw his body.

Vice presidents didn’t have time to mourn.

He simply nodded.

“Penny snuck out one night while it was raining and got a cold. She hid it from our parents— and me— and got pneumonia. She was fifteen. I just— I just wished she told me.” And Sean looked back up at Tommy, and his face said everything, oh Ender.

Fucking hell, Tommy felt sick. Sean had given up hours and hours of his time, opened his *home* to Tommy, and he turned around and made him residual guilt for the death of his fucking sister. Prime, how awful could he get?

Tommy's hands gripped his forearms in a desperate attempt to keep himself from flying into the stratosphere of self-deprecation.

"Hey, hey, I didn't tell you all that for you to blame yourself," Sean said, placing his hands on Tommy's and lightly squeezing. "You gotta let go before you hurt yourself."

Tommy shook his head, letting his hair fall into his eyes. He was such an idiot for thinking he was fine. Healing process, his ass, Tommy felt like he was just as fragile as he was leaving Logstedshire.

"Tommy."

He was having another panic attack. Tommy's eyes closed of their own will, and instead of feeling the heat of the Nether or lava surrounding him, all he could sense was stale air around him. Gunpowder and ashes wove their way through Tommy's throat, cutting off what little oxygen he was getting.

"Tommy."

Sean was there. Sean was there, and his hands were wrapped around Tommy's, and Tommy could breathe.

"*I'm okay*," Tommy mouthed, and then cringed, because what the fuck had Sean literally just talked about.

But Sean didn't say anything about it, just nodded and squeezed Tommy's hands a little tighter. The pressure grounded him, and Tommy wanted more, craved the feeling of flesh warping under his fingers, but Sean held on tight and Tommy couldn't bring himself to let go.

"I told you about Penny because you shared something with me, not because I wanted you to feel guilty. If anyone should feel bad, it should be me. I know you're not a kid, and you can take care of yourself but it's ingrained in me to worry. I just wanted you to know why."

Tommy nodded, unable to do more while his hands were busy.

Sean sighed. "I'll never push, but please, just let me know next time." He let go of Tommy's hands with a last squeeze. "Are you alright?"

A simple excuse sat on the tips of Tommy's fingers, but he pushed it away and focused on himself for a second.

"I really want to punch someone right now."

"I can work with that," Sean said.

Tommy smirked. *"You volunteering?"*

Sean stood up and offered him a hand. "You wish. But I'm sure we can make a dummy or something."

"I already have one."

Tommy led Sean outside to his backyard and pulled out one of his straw dummies from behind a tree. Sean seemed a bit surprised but let Tommy drive the stake into the ground.

With one last glance towards Sean, Tommy pulled out his diamond sword. The sun reflected on the flat of the blade, turning the blue gem into an almost electric white.

He pointed the tip at the neck of the dummy, took a deep breath in, and attacked.

Training had always been grueling and boring for Tommy, an obstacle in the way of the fun part, the actual fight. But with every slash that sent hay and fabric flying, Tommy felt a little better.

He slipped in a couple of fancy-looking moves that weren't actually practical— Tommy picked them up from Hypixel, of course— but looked badass. The tenseness in his body liquified and drained out his body from his fingertips into his sword, and he laughed.

Holy shit.

Tommy almost dropped his sword in surprise. Sean looked just as shocked.

Had he actually just *laughed*?

"I didn't hallucinate that, right?" Tommy asked.

Sean shook his head. "No, I heard you."

Tommy opened and closed his mouth a few times like a fish, debating whether to push himself and try to talk.

"Take it slow," Sean suggested.

Tommy shook himself slightly and let a smile slide onto his face. He readied his sword again and went back to attacking.

Eventually, the dummy disintegrated into nothing but dust and a wooden stake, and Tommy let his sword drop.

Sean started clapping, a grin on his face. “I have no idea what sword fighters are supposed to look like, but you seemed pretty legit.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. *“I will stab you.”*

“I don’t doubt that.”

Tommy wiped the sweat off his forehead and pulled the remains of the dummy out of the ground and tossed it to the side. He could worry about remaking it another day.

“I know you said you fought in wars,” Sean said, “and the scars were pretty telling, but... I don’t know, I’ve seen you give all the cows names and now you look like you could lead an army.”

“I wasn’t the general, just the vice president. No army leading here.”

Sean tossed him a bottle of water. “So those politics you left out included that fact that you were the vice president for a whole country, huh.”

“Fuck off.”

Tommy debated mentioning Wilbur and the can of worms that came with him, but the sun was losing its harsh glare leaving the yard in a soft glow, and Tommy felt genuinely happy for the first time in a while. There would be time, he supposed, time for all the secrets to

crawl their way to the surface like worms after rain. So he kept up the light banter with Sean and let the conversation float.

Tommy took a breath in— and out, and relaxed.

Chapter End Notes

So I finally sat down and planned out ALL of the chapters. Turns out I'm looking at about 30 chapters and over 90,000 words. It'll be the longest thing I've ever written, but I'm still super motivated and excited about the plot. So if you thought things were winding down, think again! We've got one more chapter before something big...

Also, I am definitely not emotionally prepared for the upcoming Tommy stream. He is DEFINITELY planning some self-sacrificing shit and I am NOT here for it. So we can cry together when that happens.

Finals and move out are coming soon, so updates may vary wildly for two weeks for so, just bear with me while life does it's thing. I'll try for some normalcy, but who knows. See you soon! (And thanks for all the lovely comments, you fuel me on early mornings <3)

burn

Chapter Summary

burn - fingers spread, one hand moving down (palm down) while the other moves up (palm up), both at a diagonal angle

They were back at the fateful lava pool, a decision which had taken immense amounts of persuasion to convince Sean. Tommy understood why, of course he did, the story Sean had told him about Penny stuck to his brain and never left, but for Prime's sake, it had been over four months.

Tommy was actually fine. Not the fine that you tell your friends when you desperately want to be left alone and comforted at the same time, but a genuine fine. In fact, Tommy would go so far to say that he was good, great on his best days.

Chapter Notes

I lied, one more chapter NOW until something big. Don't blame me, I'm gay, I can't count. :D Anyways, hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Four months later...

“You’re sure you know how to do this?” Sean asked nervously.

Tommy rolled his eyes, unable to answer considering he was delicately handling a bucket full of lava. It didn’t matter— Tommy had become an expert at radiating “fuck off” vibes without talking.

They were back at the fateful lava pool, a decision which had taken *immense* amounts of persuasion to convince Sean. Tommy understood why, of course he did, the story Sean had

told him about Penny stuck to his brain and never left, but for Prime's sake, it had been over four months.

Tommy was actually fine. Not the fine that you tell your friends when you desperately want to be left alone and comforted at the same time, but a genuine *fine*. In fact, Tommy would go so far to say that he was good, great on his best days.

His panic attacks were far and few between, but Sean, Misuko, or Jill were always around when he came out of the fog. Punching things helped too.

Tommy was living, and he was ever-grateful that he was still able to after the copious amount of near-death experiences he'd had. Sean's fingers still twitched when he got near the edge of a roof or came home with a few too many bruises, but they'd found a comfortable balance.

It took all this and days of bribery to persuade Sean that he would be fine going back to the lava pool, and Sean still insisted he come along. Tommy didn't mind, Sean's company was never unwanted— unless he was in one of those moods where he seriously contemplated arson. Whatever, he'd been doing that for years.

So Sean watched on the edge of the pool while Tommy stood on the dirt island he'd created in the middle.

“Is that obsidian?” Sean asked.

Tommy nodded. The steam had faded enough to reveal the lumps of black stone that reflected like oil-slicks that Tommy was carefully forming. It had taken a few tries to remember the technique Dream taught him, but his “speed-running” strategies were coming back.

Sean crouched and extended a hand as if to touch the obsidian but stopped once he felt the heat. “How the heck are you getting near this stuff?”

Tommy had another scoop of lava in the bucket and was currently working on the top of the portal frame. He shrugged. If his hands were free, he'd spout something about being a big man or some shit, but it was actually probably something to do with the fact that he'd burnt or damaged most of his nerve endings months ago.

Slowly, a rectangle formed out of the water and lava that Tommy manipulated. Sean watched, mesmerized, and he looked younger than Tommy had ever seen him. He assumed Sean was around Wilbur's age, but the more he shared about his family and life, Tommy figured he was probably closer to his own, maybe somewhere around eighteen?

Tommy winced slightly. Sean never actually asked his age... He shoved that to the back of his brain and hoped it never turned out to be a problem.

The last of the obsidian connected and Tommy slipped a steaming bucket back into his inventory. The portal was crude but it would work. Tommy had seen worse— made worse, back when he was practicing and lit one with a fiery piece of wood because he forgot the iron for a flint and steel. He silently snorted.

“Is that a Nether portal?”

“You got it.”

Sean ran his hand along the cooler side of the obsidian. “There was one in my old village, the one I grew up in. The community pitched in to create a diamond pickaxe and mine the pieces, I had no idea you could make one like this.”

“It's pretty simple once you understand the physics.”

Sean didn't even look at Tommy. He had a piece of obsidian that broke off of the portal in his palm, rotating it so the light caught the edge and shone rainbow.

“Is there a reason you want a Nether portal?”

Tommy grinned. *“I’m going to find some netherite and become richer than you could ever imagine!”*

Sean dropped the shard. “I’m sorry, what?”

“Netherite, big man, keep up. I’ve made some beds and fire resistance potions, and I’ve had diamond armor for ages. Time for an upgrade!”

“That’s super dangerous, isn’t it?”

Tommy nodded. *“The best place to find ancient debris is under the huge lava lakes.”*

“I’ve never even been in the Nether.” Sean dropped his head in his hands. “If my Nana saw me risking my neck like this...” He trailed off.

“I didn’t think you would want to come with.”

Sean groaned. “Neither did I. Are we doing this now?”

Tommy felt a little like he’d missed something. Sean “Be More Careful On Six-Block High Roofs” Whatever-His-Last-Name-Was wanted to go to the Nether. Ender, Tommy had never even seen him wear armor or hold anything more dangerous than a hoe.

“You cannot go to the Nether like that.”

Sean glanced at himself. “Do you have any extra armor?”

Tommy could have laughed. He was the most paranoid motherfucker this side of the planet, of course he had an extra set of armor. To add to that, he probably had made enough potions for at least eight people.

Tommy nodded and jerked his head towards the village. *"I've got some at home."*

Sean was a tightly packed ball of nervous energy as they made their way to Tommy's house. Tommy didn't blame him, the guy wasn't just getting out of his comfort zone, he was leaving it in the fucking dust.

The house was as he'd left it, medical supplies and healing potions on the table that he couldn't fit into his inventory. Tommy shoved them to one side to make space.

Tommy grabbed his spare set of diamond armor out of one of his many secret chests that Sean pretended not to know about.

"You really don't have to do this. I'll be fine on my own, I used to travel the Nether multiple times a day." Tommy purposely left out the fine details.

Sean shook his head. "I'll be okay. Just tell me how to put the armor on."

Tommy's eyes widened. *"Have you ever worn armor before?"*

"I'm a carrot farmer!"

"Don't villages have raids and shit?"

"Rarely, and I was younger than twelve for the last one. Stuff like this isn't common in small villages."

Tommy set everything but the boots on the table. *“At least tell me you’ve held a sword.”*

“I think?”

Well this would be interesting.

Tommy pushed Sean into one of his chairs and started unbuckling the boots. *“These are for your feet, pretty straightforward. Just make sure they cover your soles properly, otherwise the netherrack will melt your shoes.”*

Sean looked like Tommy had told him that the sky was green.

“It gets that hot?”

Tommy elected to ignore that statement and the can of worms it brought, instead waving at Sean to stick his feet in the boots. He grabbed the leggings next and undid the straps that held the thigh and calf pieces together.

“Tighten those like I did on myself, it’s just like the buckles on a knapsack.” Tommy turned so Sean could see the back of his armor and all the pieces that held it together.

While Sean followed his instructions, Tommy knelt and checked his boots, fixing all the beginner’s mistakes.

Next, Tommy lifted the front piece of the chestplate and shoved it towards Sean.

“Hold that.”

He grabbed the back piece and walked around Sean. First, he connected the strap on the shoulders and let Sean get used to the weight. Next, he cinched the waist pieces and slammed his hand on the back to make sure it all stayed together.

“I never realized how heavy these are. How do you walk around all day like this?”

Tommy shrugged. *“Honestly, I feel a bit naked without it.”*

Finally, Tommy squeezed the helmet onto Sean’s wildly curly red hair and fastened the buckle around his chin. He looked like an idiot, hair sticking out from underneath the diamond like a bird’s nest, but he wouldn’t die straight away to a ghast. Hopefully.

Sean was standing as if he moved everything would fall off him. Tommy cracked a smile.

“You can relax a bit.”

Eyes roaming around his new getup, Sean relaxed his shoulders slightly and moved his knees up and down.

“I don’t even think I’m gonna make it to the portal. Thank goodness we don’t live in the mountains, I can barely lift my legs.”

Tommy thought about the unnatural cliffs that made up the Nether and the staircase they’d have to make to get to ancient debris level. He kept the grin plastered on.

He rummaged around his chest again and pulled out a sword, bow and quiver, and a shield. Tommy handed Sean the shield first.

“You use this first. If anything seems wrong, if you hear anything scary or see a monster, you raise this up and yell for me. Don’t attack, just block. Got it?”

Sean's eyes were wide, but he slipped his arm into the strap behind the shield and nodded.

Bow and arrow next. *"Ghasts can fly. If you see or hear one, shield up and hide—I'll take care of it. This is only for emergencies."*

Sword last. *"Piglins live all over the Nether. If you don't bother them, they won't bother you. Do not hold your sword or you'll accidentally swing. This is only for if something is attacking and I can't get to you in time. Don't try anything fancy, just jab and pray. Good?"*

"Good," Sean echoed.

Tommy grabbed a couple fire resistance and health potions from his inventory, splash and normal. *"Drink one if you think you'll need to go in lava. Splash for emergencies."*

Sean pocketed the potions with steady hands.

"How many times have you respawned?"

It was an uncomfortably personal question, but Tommy was going to keep Sean drenched in potions if he'd never died before. No way in hell was Tommy going to let him burn to death the first time.

Sean paused for a moment. "Twice."

"How?" Tommy felt bad pressing, but he needed to know.

"Fall damage both times."

Overall, a painless and common way to go. Tommy barely remembered the amount of times he stumbled over a cliff and died, but he'd come to realize that the Dream SMP experience was a unique one.

"You probably won't lose a canon life, but trust me, lava is not a fun way to go. Neither are piglins, or ghasts, or any of the hellspawn that plague that place. Safety first, always." It was a bit ironic coming from Tommy, but he'd grown up a bit over the past few months.

Again, Sean nodded, eyes locked onto Tommy's.

"Last thing, and you have to promise me you'll do it no matter what, okay?"

"Okay."

"Do exactly what I say, even if you disagree. I don't care what the circumstances are, you follow my every order. That means if I tell you to run and let me die, you run and let me die. Understood?"

Sean seemed to falter at that, the words getting stuck in his throat.

"Sean, understood?"

"Understood." Sean fiddled with his chestplate, but he agreed with a strong voice, and Tommy had no choice but to trust him. He just hoped Sean would listen.

Tommy let himself shed the strict posture and clapped Sean on the back. *"We're ready to go then."*

The walk back to the portal was filled with Tommy giving Sean a crash course on the Nether, the biomes, the mobs, the structures, the whole hellish package. He seemed extremely curious about the peaceful mobs like striders and zombified piglins. Tommy entertained him

with the story about the time he rode a strider across a lava lake for a whole day because he ran out of blocks to path with.

The portal frame stuck out of the lava pool, exactly as they'd left it. Tommy pulled out his flint and steel and knocked it on the corner, lighting the portal. Purple swirled in front of them, intoxicating and mesmerizing.

"It'll be disorienting at first, but you'll be okay. Just remember to step out once we get there."

"Sure thing." Sean grinned nervously, but he joined Tommy by the portal and pulled out his shield.

They stepped into the cloud of particles, and Tommy felt the familiar pull of teleportation. It was second nature after years of jumping through hubs in Hypixel and travelling the nether highways in the SMP, but he remembered his first time.

The city Tommy had claimed as a temporary home had a portal in the town centre. One night, when there was no one around, a few of the other homeless boys dared him to go through. Tommy wasn't a pussy, of course, so he did.

Tubbo described it like a million bee stings. Tommy thought it was much, much worse.

It wasn't exactly painful. There was no word to describe how it felt to have your atoms twisted around like putty and redistributed without a care. Portals were a tear in the universe, Wilbur always said, and the universe didn't give a shit about them.

Sometimes Tommy thought it felt a bit similar to falling in lava. All of you burned away before you can even reach the magma, drifting into smoke and ash just to be respawned somewhere else. It always bugged Tommy. At his lowest, he had wondered many, many times what it would feel like without the return to life.

But the purple cleared like it always did, and Tommy grabbed Sean's arm and pulled them out. Sean fell to his knees on the netherrack, coughing up a lung.

"You didn't—" he said, "you didn't tell me it would be like that."

"Like what?"

Sean shuddered. "It felt like I was stuck in place, frozen, but at the same time there was nothing around me to hold onto."

The sadistic part of Tommy thought, *interesting, another one for the collection*, but the normal side thought, *help your fucking friend for Prime's sake*. He decided not to be an asshole.

Tommy uncorked a bottle of water and offered it to Sean who took it gratefully.

"Sorry. Figured it would be best to get it over with. There's not much you can do to prepare."

They spawned in a small section of Nether wastes bordered by a Crimson forest on one side and a lava lake on the other. Not terrible, but Tommy would have to keep an eye out for hoglins.

Sean stood with a final cough and took in their surroundings. Tommy could see sweat already pooling on his flushed forehead, but Sean's wonder seemed to be stronger than his discomfort.

"There's no sky," he murmured.

Tommy nodded. *"Have you seen the bedrock at the bottom of the world? There's a roof of it here, it's just void above that."*

“Void?”

“Endless black. Apparently it just kills you if you get too close.”

Sean shuddered. “We aren’t going up, right?”

“Nope.” Tommy pulled out his pickaxe. *“In fact, we’re going down.”*

He started to carve out a staircase through the netherrack. Thankfully, the bloody-red blocks were porous and crumbling, allowing Tommy to swing through it with ease. Soon enough, they couldn’t see anything above them but netherrack.

Tommy kept a fair distance between himself and the ground he was destroying and one hand on a splash potion in his hotbar. Sean followed him closely, shield still out. Good.

Eventually, Tommy’s pickaxe hit the ground and stopped. He kicked away the netherrack dust and spotted the striped pattern of bedrock. He held up a hand to stop Sean.

“We’re on level 4 and we need to be on level 12, so go back up eight blocks.”

Sean nodded and turned around, climbing back up and counting under his breath.

“What now?”

Tommy took out a plain white bed. *“Now, we dig a couple blocks in and step back.”* He methodically broke the netherrack as far as he could reach and placed the bed down.

“Brace yourself.”

Tommy reached out a hand, and as soon as his fingers brushed the wooden leg, the world exploded.

The familiar feeling of ringing in his ears left Tommy reeling, but he forced himself to stay upright and blinked the white out of his vision. There was fire on his pant legs, so he slapped it until it only smoldered.

Tommy had taken the brunt of the explosion, but Sean still looked a little shaken behind him. His eyes roamed around the small cavern Tommy had created, catching on the immense amount of fire and lava.

“That was...” Sean paused, “a lot.”

Tommy grinned. “*Reminds me of the glory days,*” he joked, letting a bit of sarcasm infect his inflections.

“You were on fire.”

“Just be glad we didn’t have lava drop on our heads the first time. Do you want to stick with me or go off on your own?”

Sean adjusted his grip on the shield. “I think I’ll stay with you.”

“Suit yourself.”

Tommy grabbed a stack of netherrack and used it to bridge across the fiery pit he’d created. *“Keep your eye out for the debris. Looks a bit like scales, reddish-brown, swirly like logs on top.”*

With that, he made another small tunnel, placed a bed, and clicked.

They repeated the process over and over, Tommy blowing hell to, well, hell and back, and Sean looking in every visible nook and cranny for a hint of debris. Every few explosions, he would tap Tommy's shoulder and point to a bit of it that survived and Tommy would scoop it into his inventory.

Tommy used a couple of potions to protect them before lava spilled over their heads, and he got to laugh at Sean's first reaction to fire resistance.

"It's like a warm hug! But it should be killing me!"

He wanted to laugh again, but the sound stayed in his throat so Tommy didn't push. But he wished he could.

Soon, Tommy was holding twenty ancient debris, enough for a full set of armor and a sword. Both Sean and he were covered in a thick layer of red dust, and Tommy was sporting a few burns on his arms and legs.

"Time to head back," Tommy said.

Sean was grinning from ear to ear despite the absolute mess covering him. Tommy had never seen anyone so *happy* in the fucking Nether of all places. Leave it to Sean, the walking embodiment of sunshine.

"You know," he started, "I think you were trying to scare me about the Nether. It's much nicer than you made it out to be."

"That's because we aren't on the surface."

“We can just stay down here and swim around in lava.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. *“Are you sure you aren’t hiding some blaze genetics from me or something?”*

Sean shouldered him lightly. “You just don’t know how to relax.”

“I know how to relax, dickhead.”

“Tommy, your idea of fun is arson and stealing.”

They reached the staircase, and Tommy had to turn around and climb backwards so he could shout at Sean with his hands.

“It’s cathartic!”

“Cathartic is different from fun,” Sean said.

Tommy flung his hands up. *“Fine, o’ wise one, what should I do with my time instead?”*

“You like wood carving! Do more of that, but for reasons that don’t involve murder. Or, hear me out, gardening? You’re a hands on type of guy.”

“If you are suggesting that I play with flowers all day I will cut your dick off.”

Sean laughed, deep and cackling. “Fair enough, I should have seen that coming. But you should find a good hobby.”

"I still need to finish the house."

"And after that?"

Tommy internally groaned. *"I don't know! Just let me live in blissful ignorance."*

They reached the top of the staircase, climbing back onto the netherrack ground. Tommy kept facing Sean, determined to prove that he didn't need to change anything about his lifestyle. Sure, Sean could see him sign from the side, but it was much more fun this way, especially if Tommy just gave up on normal speech and started flinging curses at him.

"You are such an idiot," Sean teased.

"Pussyhole. Dickhead. Bitch. Asshole."

See, he had a hobby!

Tommy was so focused on the conversation that he almost didn't hear the faraway screech of a ghast. He barely had a second to turn and raise his shield up to block the hit.

The fireball slammed into him, burning a good portion of his shield and singeing all the hairs left on Tommy's arm. There was definitely already a bruise forming on his forearm.

Shit, Tommy thought, and scanned the sky for the ghostly white bitch.

"Tommy?" Sean's nerves were clear in his voice, but Tommy couldn't answer with his hands full, and he didn't dare drop the shield until he knew where the enemy was.

There.

Tommy spotted a flash of white in the distance just as another fireball appeared in the fog. He dodged this one, careful to keep track of Sean, and dashed to the right.

“Just keep your shield up,” Tommy said, “It’s focused on me, and the portal is just over that ridge.”

“Aye aye, captain.”

The next shot came straight for Tommy, and he knew he had to take the hit or risk Sean being caught behind him. His shield was already hanging on by a thread, so Tommy equipped his sword in a blink and swung.

The speeding projectile of fiery death collided with the diamond of Tommy’s sword, creating a bright flash of light. The fireball ricocheted off the blade and shot back into the fog with a wail.

Fuck, Tommy hated this. They’d be okay, but both his hands were full, and he couldn’t say anything to reassure Sean. Tommy just had to hope he didn’t freak out.

The ghost gave another screech and shot again. Tommy relaxed his tight grip on his sword’s hilt and prepared to reflect it again.

Just as the fireball was about to hit, Tommy heard another cry from behind them.

“Tommy!”

Tommy hit the fireball, aim slightly off, but it went careening away from danger anyways. As soon as he could, he spun on his heel and readied for a blind shot to the next barrage.

The heat almost overwhelmed him, but Tommy managed to deflect the fireball anyways. Unfortunately, his blade was twisted just slightly downwards, and the projectile only made it a few feet away before hitting the ground. This would have been fine if not for the presence of at least ten zombified piglins directly in the blast zone.

Fuck.

Groans filled the air, and every zombified piglin in the area turned towards them.

Fuck, fuck, fucking fuck.

Tommy dropped his shield into his inventory. *“Run to the portal and wait for me on the other side.”*

Thankfully, the piglins were only angry at Tommy, but he knew from experience they would hurt anything in their path to the attacker. He'd died to one after Fundy dicked around in the Nether and got them both in trouble.

Sean hesitated, shield still up, but his fingers twitched like he wanted to grab a weapon he couldn't even use.

Ender, Tommy really, really wanted to scream. He wanted to grab Sean by the shoulders and yell at him for being such a selfless idiot because for fuck's sake, that was going to get him killed one day.

Instead, he raised his hand one last time. *“You promised.”*

Tommy turned to face the oncoming mob, sighing in relief when he heard the faint noise of boots on netherrack getting further away.

Golden swords slammed into Tommy's shield, some shattering immediately while others came back for a second swing. All he could do was keep backing up slowly to buy Sean time.

One piglin slammed the pommel of their sword into the shield, and the wood shattered around Tommy's forearm. He reached into his inventory, taking a hit as he did, and pulled out an ender pearl.

Tommy tossed the pearl as far away from the portal as he dared, far enough that there weren't any zombified piglins in immediate reach. His ankles throbbed from the impact, but Tommy threw down a splash potion of healing and sucked in a breath.

This was familiar. This was easy. Tommy had faced so many opponents that should have killed him immediately without remorse or second thought, but he knew how to work his way out of a sticky situation. He'd fought against the Blade and survived, after all.

The piglins flocked to Tommy, more and more adding to their masses as the seconds trickled by. Tommy. He pulled out another pearl, ignoring the blood that trickled down his arm and into his palm. As long as it didn't affect his aim, it didn't matter.

Only death was permanent. Everything else could be healed.

The second before the piglins reached him, Tommy threw the pearl in a high arc towards what he hoped would be the nether portal. He had to block a sword with the bone in his forearm because of the delay, but quickly teleported away.

Sean was long gone, hopefully on the other side, so Tommy jumped into the portal.

He was ripped apart and put back together again. In the moment where Tommy was in between the planes of existence, he remembered a story.

Technoblade loved mythology. Greek, Roman, Chinese, Norse, whatever he could get his hands on. Tommy asked him why he preferred myths to normal fiction, and Techno just

raised an eyebrow.

“Myths aren’t fiction.”

Tommy scoffed. “It’s literally in the name, dumbass.”

“Every story is based on something.” Techno flipped a page, not bothering to look up from the book. “You just have to figure out how much is reality.”

So after Techno called him Theseus at the Festival, Tommy did his research. He wasn’t dumb — if Techno was comparing him to a Greek figure, there was more to the story.

What Techno told Tommy was true, but he left out a few key details. One being Theseus’s death, of course, and Tommy tried his best to not look into that. What intrigued Tommy, however, was a story not about Theseus himself, but his ship.

At first, Tommy dismissed it as some bullshit philosopher’s came up with to keep their job, something Wilbur would eat up, but the more he read, the more he thought.

The question was simple. If Theseus’s ship was replaced plank by plank until no original piece remained, was it still the original ship? And in addition, if a ship was built from the old planks, which ship, if either, was Theseus’s ship?

Tommy pondered the question for a few days, letting his mind wander as he helped rebuild L’manburg and explored the sewers.

And then Tubbo exiled him.

Tommy had half the mind to knock down Techno’s door and ask him if he could see the future. Unfortunately, Tommy knew the real answer. Techno was just unfairly smart.

And if Techno was right about Theseu's exile, what else was he right about?

So Tommy thought back to Theseus's ship and wondered if the question could be applied to himself. Here he was, his bones and skin being removed and reformed like the proverbial planks. When he came out the other side, would he still be Tommy or someone entirely new?

If the others from the SMP saw Tommy now, would he still be Tommy to them? Over the past few months, Tommy had broken down to the barest part of his soul and slowly rebuilt. The lava pool had burned away his walls, but Sean and Misuko helped him recover. If they added their own little touches, if Tommy had absorbed a few parts of his friends when he learned how to be a person again, could he still call himself Tommy?

Tommy didn't know if he wanted to be a new person.

On one hand, he desperately missed some of the people back at the SMP, especially Tubbo—Ender, he missed Tubbo. He held a part of Wilbur in him when he listened to the village musicians. Techno showed in every swing of his sword, even if Tommy tried desperately not to let him. Niki was the reason he loved cookies and hated cake. Jack was there to move Tommy's hands when he used slang from a place he never grew up in.

On the other hand, he never wanted to see any of them again. Because while Wilbur was why he loved to hear a slow ballad on the guitar, he was also the reason why Tommy coughed when he smelled gunpowder and never left his house without armor. Tommy hated fireworks and wither skeletons because of Techno. Niki sounded like the voices that told him he was at fault for Wilbur's death. Jack was a constant reminder that Tommy was disrespected not because of his age but himself.

Tubbo.

Tommy saw Tubbo in everything.

Tubbo was woven through the fabric of Tommy so tightly it was hard to tell where one started and where one ended until they were ripped apart, and then Tommy wondered how much of himself was really *him*.

Did he smile at bees because he enjoyed them, or because he loved the joy on Tubbo's face as he gushed facts about them?

Did he avoid alcohol because it reminded him of Schlatt or because Tubbo flinched when he smelled it?

Did Tommy avoid letting himself get close to others because Tubbo had shut him out, or was that Tommy from the very beginning?

And then the portal spit Tommy out into the overworld, and he felt more disoriented than ever.

“Oh my Ender, Tommy, I thought you weren't coming back!”

Sean wrapped his arms around Tommy, but he was still reeling from his revelation— could he even call it that? Had he even figured anything out, or had he just given himself more questions to agonize over when he couldn't sleep at night?

“I'm alright, Sean.”

Sean laughed, open and full of relief. “I am never doing that again.”

Tommy smiled, and he wasn't sure if it was fake or not.

“Sounds good.”

Chapter End Notes

Again, sorry, NOW one more chapter until a big event. It might introduce a tag that's been sitting there for a while...

The Ship of Theseus monologue is inspired by a fic by patchpuppe. Please go check it out, it deserves more kudos and has a lovely conversation between Tommy and Techno. I, of course, took a a bit of an angstier route (as always) :D
<https://archiveofourown.org/works/29947914>

Also, I read Passerine today. Right before my final. In one sitting. I cannot think about it without tearing up. I am currently crying. Please go read it.

This is officially the longest thing I've ever written. Huzzah! I don't know how this came out so long (again lol) but more content for y'all I guess. Thanks for the kudos and support, I love you guys. (/parasocial, of course)

health

Chapter Summary

health - The fingertips of both hands (excluding the thumbs) in a cupped shape move away from the body to form a thumbs up. The tongue should stick out of the mouth slightly.

It was almost completely dark, just a sliver of deep blue sky left on the horizon. Thankfully, the moon was partially obscured by clouds.

Tommy kept one hand on his sword hilt and dashed across the street to a secluded alley. One of the buildings was partially collapsed, allowing Tommy easy access to climb onto the other's roof.

Since the weather was getting warmer, most of the homeless people had switched from sleeping during the day to the night, thankful for the chance of a good night's sleep. Unfortunately, that meant that the bigger camps of people were being targeted by more and more thieves.

Chapter Notes

Another day, another chapter! Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Two and a half months later...

“Are you ever gonna bring your Irish friend around?” Misuko asked. She had a drink in one hand and was fiddling with a pocket knife with the other.

“Sean?” Tommy wrote, *“I think he might have a stroke if you met.”*

Misuko snorted. “Is he a good little Catholic boy?”

Tommy just rolled his eyes. He was spending a few hours in the backroom before the sun set and he had to go out. Misuko had been glad to skive off bar duty and hang out.

Her left bicep flexed as she twirled the knife around, accentuating the new tattoo she had just gotten. Tommy couldn't help but watch the art stretch and flex on her skin.

"They're apple blossoms," Misuko said.

Tommy snapped his head up when he realized he was staring. He pushed his embarrassment away and tilted his head in question.

"Why?"

Tommy nodded.

"I don't know," Misuko said, "thought they just looked pretty, you know? Not everything needs a deeper meaning." She took the last swig of her drink.

The clock on the wall showed the sun setting, just a few more minutes until it was properly dark. Tommy wrapped up his book and shoved it back into a pocket underneath his armor.

The netherite set was unenchanted, leaving a dark grey that let Tommy blend into the shadows. It was getting harder and harder to find petty criminals to stop, and he had resorted to sneaking around as much as possible.

"Are you heading out?"

Tommy nodded and gave her a mock salute like always.

Misuko raised her glass in response. “Have fun walking old ladies across the street!”

He flipped her off as he walked out the door.

It was almost completely dark, just a sliver of deep blue sky left on the horizon. Thankfully, the moon was partially obscured by clouds.

Tommy kept one hand on his sword hilt and dashed across the street to a secluded alley. One of the buildings was partially collapsed, allowing Tommy easy access to climb onto the other’s roof.

Since the weather was getting warmer, most of the homeless people had switched from sleeping during the day to the night, thankful for the chance of a good night’s sleep. Unfortunately, that meant that the bigger camps of people were being targeted by more and more thieves.

Just the other day, Tommy had to keep someone from stealing a woman’s prosthetic leg while she slept. Who the fuck does that?

He dashed from roof to roof, thankful that Sean had made him take the day off from farming to relax and talk with Misuko. His muscles were slightly stiff from the horse ride, but once Tommy got moving, he felt like he was flying.

Sometimes Tommy couldn’t believe he was in the same body that went through exile. He remembered being able to count his ribs without feeling for them, and as much as he wanted to, he couldn’t forget constantly throwing up until his body readjusted to food again.

Apparently Sean had noticed the difference too, and mentioned it the other day.

“You know you’ve gotten taller, somehow,” he mentioned.

Tommy was practically up to his elbows in dirt and had to take a moment to process what Sean had said.

“What?”

“You’re taller. And stronger. I don’t know how skinny you were before... all that, but you definitely don’t look like a lanky kid anymore. You’ve even got some peach fuzz.”

Tommy glanced down at himself. The calluses on his hands from swords and bows hadn’t faded, but they were joined with new ones. Tommy ran his thumb over one in the spot where he held his wood carving tool.

He couldn’t tell if he was taller, but he had to admit he’d gained more muscle than he’d ever had in his life. The combination of sparring, building, and farming had defined his arms and shoulders, and his legs had followed with help from Tommy’s non-stop movement.

It was easier to notice as he ran across rooftops in a full set of armor. Tommy was *strong*, really strong, in fact. He wondered if he dueled Dream again, would his win this time?

He let his daydreams slip away as he approached the first group of people. They were huddled in the entrance to a large sewer that led out of the city. Most were sleeping, but a few wandered around or held watch for their friends. He didn’t think of Tubbo doing the same for him just a few years ago.

Tommy stayed perched on the roof closest to everyone and waited. He scanned the sleeping bodies and quickly realized that most of them were kids. His heart dropped. There were about ten— fifteen people packed into the small space, and Tommy was almost certain that none of them were older than him.

Fuck, even Hypixel would be a better place than here. There wasn’t an active admin for hundreds of blocks, meaning they’d have to travel to leave, but it also meant they were effectively trapped in the city.

Tommy's anger simmered lightly under his skin. He got comfortable in the SMP, forgot what it was like to sleep under the stars because you had nowhere else. He thought about the netherite armor on his body that used to be diamond and the ender chest back home filled with valuables. Mostly, he thought about the neon lights that filled public servers that flashed outrageous ticket prices.

He was almost about to drop down to— fuck, he didn't know, do *something*, when new movement caught his eye.

A woman turned the corner of Tommy's building and headed towards the sewer pipe. She was short and hunched over, but Tommy had a good enough eye to see that she was at least a decade older than anyone else here.

The kids that were awake didn't notice or question here, just stepped aside as she passed. Tommy rested his hand on the pommel of his sword, itching to move.

He waited.

The suspicious stranger seemed to look for a place to sit for a few seconds before claiming a spot shoved in between two sleeping lumps. She lay on her side and closed her eyes. Tommy kept watching.

About five minutes passed before Tommy managed to catch the most miniscule movement. He expected to see a hand reaching into a pocket or bag, but instead the woman tapped on the shoulder of the kid next to her.

The kid woke slowly, groggy from the heat that radiated off the paved streets. Tommy saw the moment where the two strangers locked eyes— the kid froze, and the woman put her finger on her lips.

Every bone in Tommy's body was buzzing, something inside him screaming to just *get in there and fight, you idiot*.

The kid nodded but still looked just as statue-still. Tommy wished he could see their face, but at least he was able to watch the woman as she spoke. He was too far to read her lips, but he could see the sickly sweet smile sitting on her lips. Tommy shivered.

The woman placed a hand on the kid's shoulder and squeezed. To anyone else, it would look like reassurance from a friend, but Tommy could peer past the layers of manipulation and see the targeted pressure.

Once the kid reached into their pocket and placed something on the woman's outstretched hand, Tommy was done waiting.

He slipped off the roof as silently as possible and walked toward the camp. Most of his armor was hidden within or under black clothes, but Tommy still got stares as he walked between the people. He supposed he really didn't look like a kid anymore.

Tommy slinked over towards the woman and the kid, hoping to catch a sliver of their conversation before he intervened.

The woman's voice was low and quiet, more discernible as a low hum than talking, but Tommy could hear bits of the kid.

"—think I should try again so soon."

A pause and a hum.

"I know, I'm sorry, but—" their voice cut out, "—trying my best."

The woman lifted her hand again, probably to grip the kid's shoulder again, but Tommy dashed forward and rammed his shoulder into her just hard enough to make them both stumble.

Tommy held his hands out like he was trying to help steady her and opened his eyes wide in fake surprise.

“Sorry!” he repeated the sign over and over, mouthing the words along with the sign.

The woman regained her balance quickly, but narrowed her eyes at Tommy. For a second, her gaze flicked to his shoulders, but she made eye contact again quickly.

“Are you alright?” she asked. Tommy had to give her credit, her smile almost seemed real, but he was good at watching out of the corner of his eyes, and it dropped the second he looked away.

Tommy pulled out his book and quill with some difficulty considering he was still trying to hide his armor.

“Sorry, I think I tripped on something. I’m fine though.” He didn’t ask how she was but plastered a cheesy grin on his face anyways.

Tommy scratched out another message before either of them could talk, purposely turning the nib of the pen so it made a heavily annoying sound that no one wanted to speak over.

“Hey, I thought you said we were going to sleep by the bridge tonight.” He faced the book towards the kid but left enough of an angle for the woman to peek which she obviously did.

The kid frowned, and Tommy was praying to any god up there that they would figure out what he was trying to do, but they were already opening their mouth.

“Yeah, but you didn’t show up today so I thought you bailed.”

Thank Ender.

The woman shifted her weight and one hand slipped into her pocket where the mysterious item rested.

She smiled again. “Callum, would you introduce me to your friend?”

Callum shrugged, and Tommy was surprised at how well he was acting. “We aren’t friends, really, just watch each other’s backs.” He motioned to Tommy. “Beth, meet Jay. Jay, meet Beth.”

Tommy waved. At the same time, he was trying to think of a distraction to cause in order to pickpocket Beth.

She frowned slightly. “Nice to meet you, Jay. I would love to keep... chatting,” Beth glanced at his book, and Tommy forced himself to keep from decking her, “— but I have to leave. I’ll talk to you later, Callum.”

Tommy clapped his hands, grabbing Beth’s attention before she could turn and leave.

“Can you hold on for a second?”

Beth narrowed her eyes. “Sure.”

Tommy rested his hand on his shoulder and used it to balance on one foot, grabbing the other. He took off his shoe— thank Ender he left his netherite boots at home— and shook it like there was something inside. At the same time, he slowly shifted his weight onto his one foot and used the hand to rummage into Beth’s pocket.

His hand brushed something cold and metal, and Tommy grabbed it.

Both Beth and Callum stared at his shoe and once nothing came out, they looked at Tommy instead. He gave a stupid grin and shrugged.

Beth brushed his hand off her shoulder. “Goodbye, boys.”

Tommy gave her a thumbs up while Callum simply watched her walk away.

“Okay, who the hell are you and what are you playing at?” Callum hissed.

Tommy internally sighed and opened his book back up. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Beth pause— and stick her hand in her pocket.

Shit.

Tommy barely had time to drop the book before the bitch was pulling out a crossbow and firing it. He felt the movement of air beside him, thanking his lucky stars that she missed. He unsheathed his sword, threw on his mask, and started to run after the retreating figure of Beth when a gasp made him stop.

“Jay. A little help here.”

Callum was on the ground with a dripping slit in his thigh. It wasn’t a fatal wound, not even close, in fact, since the arrow had gone straight through.

Tommy glanced back to Beth. She was already scaling a building blocks ahead. Tommy was fast, he could catch her easily if he left now. Blood was pumping through him. His body was begging for something to fight, to punch, to main.

But the sleeping kids were awake and staring at the chaos with scared eyes, and Callum's breathing was shallow with pain, and Tommy knew they didn't know how to keep it from getting infected.

Ender fucking dammit.

Tommy sheathed his sword and ran to Callum's side, already pulling out bandages and an emergency regeneration potion. Thank Prime he didn't have to deal with removing an arrowhead.

Callum groaned. "Once I can stand I'm going to punch you."

Tommy ignored him, pulling out a small knife and cutting away the pants around the wound. His instincts kicked in. Months of being groomed into a soldier were not easily reversed.

Lifting Callum's leg, Tommy checked the exit wound. A bruise was already forming around the small hole, but it wasn't leaking too much blood for Tommy to be in a rush.

He grabbed the book he dropped and scribbled out a short message. "*Take the potion.*"

Tommy held out the regen bottle for Callum to take.

"You sure? I'm not paying you back for it," he snapped.

Tommy shook his head and motioned for Callum to drink. He did.

Watching closely, Tommy waited for the rush of adrenaline that came with intense potions to hit. In just a few seconds, Callum's pupils dilated and he relaxed just slightly. As soon as he exhaled, Tommy wrapped the bandages around Callum's thigh and tightened.

Callum hissed in pain, but the temporary ecstasy was enough to keep him from yelling at Tommy again. Quickly, Tommy knotted the bandages and stepped back.

A couple of the nearby kids were scurrying around, one approaching with a water bottle for Callum. Most of them were looking at Tommy.

“It’s the raccoon guy I was telling you about,” someone whispered.

Tommy took another step back.

“Oi!” Callum shouted, “you owe me a punch, remember. You’re also not allowed to run away until you tell me what the hell that was all about.”

Well, so much for a quick escape.

Tommy walked back to Callum’s side, hyper aware of the many eyes following him.

“Sit.” Callum patted the ground next to him.

His breathing was mostly evened out, and Tommy couldn’t see any blood seeping through the bandages yet. As long as he didn’t go climbing any mountains or deep sea diving, he’d be fine. Another scar to brag about.

Callum took a deep sip of the water bottle. “You’ve got the key I gave her, don’t you?”

Tommy had forgotten about the little metal thing that got them into trouble in the first place. He took it out of his pocket. It was a key, just like Callum said, simple iron and with no markings.

“What’s it to?”

Callum leaned in slightly and lowered his voice. “The backdoor to a shop downtown.”

“Trying to rob the place?”

He scowled. “Not me— Beth. She had me get the key.”

Tommy frowned. *“Is she paying you?”*

“Sort of. I’ve got a friend that’s sick. Beth got me the medicine in exchange for a favor.” Callum sucked a breath in, adjusting the position of his leg. “I didn’t know it would be something like that, and she— my friend isn’t getting better, so I have to keep asking, and…” he trailed off, waving a hand carelessly.

Tommy wished he had at least gotten a punch in. Fucking manipulative bitch.

“What kind of medicine?”

Callum shrugged. “Heath. Regen. Anything we can get. It’s some infection in her lungs.”

Sean’s words echoed in Tommy’s ears. *She hid it from our parents— and me— and got pneumonia. She was fifteen.*

Tommy couldn’t just give out his potions to every sick kid. They were expensive and time consuming to make, and he’d have to get more blaze rods soon at this rate. Besides, he actually needed them for himself when he got hurt.

“What’s the name of the shop?”

“Why?”

Tommy rolled his eyes. *“I’m going to return the key, dickhead. Just tell me.”*

“Fuck off. It’s something like Bert’s Cigars or whatever. I don’t know, I didn’t get a good look at it.”

Tommy stood up, doing one last check on Callum’s wound.

“I saw you before you put on the mask, you know,” Callum said.

Tommy froze.

“You’re not that old,” he continued, “eighteen, nineteen? You’ve got netherite under that cloak, and you just used a potion on a stranger that would have cost me the price of a liver on the black market.”

“So?”

Callum motioned to the kids around them. “So, why are you here? I know you can fight well — well enough to win at Hypixel or some other shithole. Why are you helping *us*?”

Tommy knew how Callum must see it. There was no mark on him, no universal signal that he’d been homeless just like them a few years ago. To Callum, he was another rich asshole. But Tommy remembered every night on the streets like it was the other day.

He remembered the hunger pains, the nausea after eating something rotten. He remembered the beds made out of dirty cobble paths and the almost unbearable winters.

Most importantly, Tommy remembered when Tubbo broke his arm.

They were messing around on a random server just a few portals away from Hypixel, and Tubbo overestimated his height— like always. Tommy jumped onto another block on a cliff face and Tubbo followed, just barely missing.

Thankfully, he wasn't hurt badly, but neither Tommy or Tubbo knew first aid, so they had no idea that the bone could grow back wrong. Fast forward a month or so, and Tubbo's arm was crooked and in constant pain.

It took Tommy another month to save up enough money for a doctor— if you could call him that— to re-break and set it.

Fuck.

Tommy took out his last two potions, one instant health II and another regeneration. He held them out for Callum to take.

The kid's eyes widened, and he snatched at the potions like Tommy was going to take them back any second.

“You're fucking with me.”

Tommy shook his head. *“Ask the kids if they're hungry.”*

“What?”

“Ask the other kids here if they want food.”

Callum managed to turn himself so he could lean against the wall of the sewer pipe and face most of the group. Everyone was pretending to be sleeping or talking amongst themselves, but Tommy could tell they were all zeroed in.

“He’s uh—” Callum called, “he’s asking if you all are hungry.”

Tommy took out his whole stack of bread and the few pieces of steak he had left.

Kids dashed towards him at the speed of light, some still tangled up in whatever blankets they had scrounged up. Hands of all sizes grabbed at the food, and in seconds, it was all gone.

The oldest split their pieces and gave half to the younger kids that hadn’t made it in time, and soon everyone was munching on food in peace.

Tommy handed Callum a golden carrot.

He took a bite out of it, closing his eyes once the fresh taste hit his tongue.

“You’re a good person.”

Tommy said nothing, just kept looking at the kids in front of him that truly seemed alive for the first time in a while.

“You’re a good person,” Callum repeated.

Tommy slipped his book back into his jacket, effectively cutting off the conversation. He slunk back into the shadows that Beth ran into, but not before signing “*thank you*” Callum. He wouldn’t understand, but it made Tommy feel better.

“See you around,” Callum called after him.

The night was still young, but Tommy felt more tired than he’d been in a while. He hadn’t even swung his sword, but the ever-present itch to feel something under his knuckles had dissipated for the moment.

He slipped into the stables at Misuko’s bar, thankful that she was upfront working. If she saw him leave this early, no doubt Tommy would have to answer a flurry of slightly invasive questions.

The ride back was peaceful. Sean was forcing him to take his horse after discovering that Tommy was “borrowing” others, so he didn’t push the pace and took in the scenery instead.

Tommy didn’t like plains biomes. That was a fact, plain and simple. Tactically, they were too open and flat for any kind of good coverage, and the wind was awful for shooting arrows or listening for mobs. If someone asked Tommy why he hated plains, those were the reasons he’d give.

In reality, his netherite armor meant he shouldn’t have to fear anything like that. Tommy really hated plains biomes because they reminded him of exile.

The village was fine, thankfully. As long as Tommy could see houses on the horizon, his heart stayed steady and his hands didn’t shake. But out here in the wilderness? He hated it.

All that said, it was hard for Tommy to hate the current view. The moon was full and much larger than normal, hovering just above eyeline. He could see the darker grey patch that Wilbur always said looked like Austria. Tommy never knew what the fuck he was on about.

The moon illuminated most of the rolling grassy hills. For once, the wind was just a slight breeze, and it almost looked like the grass was dancing to a ballad, slow and relaxed.

Soon enough, the village appeared on the horizon, and Tommy headed home.

Once the horse was tied up and fed for the night, Tommy stepped into his house, flipping off the spruce door for tradition. He probably needed to eat something, considering he gave away all his food, but his feet led him to his bedroom instead.

Ender, he was exhausted. Tommy stripped his armor and let it drop on the floor. He would hit himself in the morning for not taking care of it like he should, but current-Tommy couldn't care less. He collapsed on his bed, still fully clothed. The second Tommy's head hit the pillow, he was out.

He didn't dream.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was brought to you by Dr. Joseph Howland Bill, a Civil War doctor who wrote a whole essay on treating arrow wounds in the field. Fly high, and all writers thank you.

Fun fact (tw: a bit gorey), Dr. Bill treated two cases where the arrowhead hit just the right place to cause the muscle nearby to seize hard enough to actually bend the (metal!) arrowhead around the bone in a hook shape. I just thought y'all should know that.

I cannot express how happy I am that Wilbur is back. He's the reason I started watching, and as much as I love c!Tommy, there's just something about watching that unhinged motherfucker dance around the SMP and sweet talk everyone. I am also ecstatic about his dynamic with Ranboo.

Anyways, I am moving out of my dorm today! Updates may be a little delayed since I have no idea how this will affect my already chaotic and fickle mental health. Also, peep the profile picture update! I somehow drew straight for 8 hours straight, and I haven't done digital art in almost a year. I'm half-convinced it was a fever dream. Love y'all like always <3

daughter

Chapter Summary

daughter - Left index pointed upwards, right index and thumb touching the left index's tip and base respectively, should form a capital "D", and tap them together twice

Tommy woke to a loud clanging noise that seemed to radiate through his ears. For a second, he thought he was back in Church Prime, ringing the bell with Wilbur as they made fun of Tubbo outside. Then, he remembered he was in his house at the edge of the village. Shit. Shit.

He threw on his shoes and armor, grabbing whatever weapons he could find and flung himself out the door. Already, there was smoke rising from a building in the town's center, and Tommy could hear screaming. His stomach rolled. Not the time, Tommy thought, there are people to save.

Chapter Notes

I heard y'all wanted a child? :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Four months later...

Tommy woke to a loud clanging noise that seemed to radiate through his ears. For a second, he thought he was back in Church Prime, ringing the bell with Wilbur as they made fun of Tubbo outside. Then, he remembered he was in his house at the edge of the village. Shit. *Shit.*

He threw on his shoes and armor, grabbing whatever weapons he could find and flung himself out the door. Already, there was smoke rising from a building in the town's center, and Tommy could hear screaming. His stomach rolled. *Not the time*, Tommy thought, *there are people to save.*

His fears were confirmed when he spotted the grey cloak of a pillager slip into his neighbor's house. Tommy sprinted over and slammed open the door, sword out and ready to swing. The pillager was arms deep in a chest and apparently wasn't expecting him. It was easy for Tommy to drive his sword between its ribs and even easier for him to pull it out and keep running.

Tommy hadn't spotted any ravagers yet, but the pillagers seemed to be doing enough damage on their own. He couldn't see the iron golems anywhere. Most of the villagers were running away, pulling their children or livestock away from the carnage. Tommy spun in a circle, trying to see if anyone else was fighting. There were no gleam of iron swords, no bows drawn and aimed from above.

Well, Tommy had fought on his own before, and he was still alive. That had to count for something, right?

He sprinted towards the fire.

Tommy knocked down a pillager with a crossbow before it could shoot and sliced his sword across its neck. Another one down. Smoke was starting to fill the air, and he dipped in and out of the streets, using the low visibility for cover. Another pillager. Kick, slash, pull.

His world seemed to narrow to an assortment of greys— the pillager uniforms, the heavy smoke, the glint of his sword. He hadn't enchanted the netherite weapon yet, holding off in the hope he wouldn't need it, but he could never rest, could he?

It's not your time to die, Tommy.

Tommy swung at another pillager. *Damn right it's not.* He let the spite run through him, let it fuel his muscles. Every pillager that went down proved them wrong, letting the whole world know that Tommyinnit wasn't going to lay down and die. Lunge. *Down with the revolution, boys.* Jab. *As the emperor of L'manburg...* Slice. *Let's be the bad guys, Tommy.* Punch. *I'm your only friend.* Snap.

Tommy barely glanced at the pillager whose head he had just caved in. Fire was licking at the path in front of him— it had already consumed whoever's house used to stand in front of him. He could see a fire brigade trying to help in the midst of the fight, but villagers were being picked off one by one. Finally, he was able to spot a few fighting, but they seemed hopelessly outnumbered.

Pulling out a golden apple, Tommy bit a large chunk out of it and threw himself back into the battle. Even after years, he still slipped into the patterns countless battles had taught him. His fighting in the cities kept him in shape, but a duel was completely different to war— a different beast.

He was back to back with another villager, dodging crossbow shots and killing those with axes. Tommy could only trust the other person had his back, quite literally.

Other villagers flocked to their duo, and eventually the fighters formed a circle of protection around the fire brigade. Tommy was almost surprised at how well the villagers communicated with just a few glances through the smoke; he wondered how many of them had fought together.

At some point in the fight, Tommy acquired a crossbow with a few arrows, and he shot down a few pillagers that had made their way to the tops of buildings. He was ever-thankful they didn't use normal bows.

After what barely felt like minutes to Tommy, it seemed like there were more dead pillagers than living ones. However, the fighters around him seemed to be flagging, and with a second glance, he noticed how old some of them were. Thankfully, he couldn't spot Sean among them or the dead.

Tommy glanced at the half-stack of gapples in his inventory.

He dashed between the fighters, shoving gapples into the hands of villagers. Some grabbed them out of his pack as he ran through the crowd. Tommy fought down his every instinct to fight back and let them take what they needed. Just a few moments later, and the resistance seemed renewed.

Tommy rejoined the fight, and after killing another four pillagers, he watched a woman take down the last one. There were bodies littered everywhere from both sides, but the villagers in the fire brigade seemed mostly unharmed. The fire had been kept from spreading, but the house it started out was nothing more than a few ashen logs. Tommy sucked in a breath. If anyone had been inside, they were long gone.

Too many people were bleeding, burned, or limping. Tommy followed the crowd of the injured to Isla's bakery, which seemed to be a temporary medical base. Inside was chaos, the screams of the dying echoing over the medics' calls for help.

Tommy jumped into action, grabbing rolls of bandages and potions. He scanned the room for the worst of injuries and focused on a man with a stab wound through the abdomen.

His hands worked on autopilot, dabbing splash potions and suturing the gash at the same time. It had been months since Tommy needed these skills, but he never really forgot. Even if his mind didn't remember, his body did.

Once the man was stable, Tommy moved on. This time, it was a woman with burns melted into her skin. Tommy sucked in a breath. With anyone else, it was unlikely she would survive, but Tommy had experience with this. He knew what to do.

Tommy combined potions into a concoction he had fed to Tubbo for days after the festival. The woman would scar badly, just like him, but she would live.

He applied the potions and wrapped her up in bandages, testing the pressure with a steady hand. The second he was done, someone else stepped in, a villager he recognized but didn't know. Hands led him to a chair, but Tommy shook his head and headed to the next patient.

A man with a gash across his face. Multiple people with arrow wounds. Tommy's shoulder ached in solidarity. Head trauma.

Thankfully, there weren't any children among the injured. Tommy didn't know what he would have done if Jill was bleeding out in front of him.

Sounds blended together, and Tommy could only focus on the immediate in front of him. Dab. Soak. Wrap. Move on. Repeat.

Eventually, the hands returned and managed to force him to sit down. Tommy blamed it on the fact that his feet were absolutely aching from standing for so long. Someone was tending to a cut on his leg, a shallow wound that was far from serious, but Tommy let them fuss. He could just eat a gapple when got home.

“Tommy,” Isla’s voice cut through the din of the room.

He looked up and realized that the person wrapping his leg had been Isla the whole time. Fuck, she must have been talking to him, and he hadn’t noticed.

“*Yes?*”

She tied the bandages into a knot. “You need to rest.”

“*Other people need help.*”

“Tommy, you’ve treated almost everyone here already. We’re okay.”

He scanned the room and noticed his handiwork in most of the patients, excluding those with surface injuries. Most of the helpers were already sitting down, sipping on water bottles or eating. He couldn’t see anyone in dire need.

Isla put her hands on Tommy’s shoulders, forcing him to look her in the eyes. “See? You did good, you can go home.”

Tommy nodded, standing on shaky legs. Isla led him to the door and pressed a regeneration potion into his hands. He should have refused, he had plenty at home, but Tommy was too tired to argue and simply left.

He was barely a few steps down the streets when a voice called to him, “Tommy!”

Tommy turned to Sean running towards him, arms waving. He barely had time to blink before Sean barrelled into him and wrapped Tommy in a hug.

“Are you alright?”

Sean released Tommy so he could sign.

“I’m fine. Where were you?”

“I was evacuating people to the nearby caves. Where were *you* ?”

Tommy gestured to his sword. Sean seemed to notice the wound on his leg for the first time, eyes widening.

“You fought?”

“Yes, I fought.”

Sean stared at the blade for a second before coming back to himself. “Tommy, I’m twenty and I’m not supposed to fight pillagers. I know you can’t handle yourself one on one, but this is... I mean, what the hell were you thinking?”

“Are you really stupid enough to think I haven’t fought before?”

In the midst of villagers yelling and fire crackling, Sean's silence was deafening.

Tommy waved his hand around his face. *"It's not like my scars are subtle. I'm getting fucking sick and tired of you pretending I'm normal and fine."* His hands were whipping around, losing coherence as Tommy gained anger. *"I've fought before today— in fact, I've killed before today, and I did it again, and it definitely won't be the last time. So stop treating me like a fucking kid!"*

Tommy punctuated his last words with a shove to Sean's chest.

"Leave me the fuck alone."

He turned on his heel and stalked through the village. Just moments ago, he was dead on his feet, but arguing with Sean left him with another adrenaline rush. Fuck.

Villagers were moving rubble and bodies through the streets, already working on rebuilding. Tommy wondered how often this happened, if some of the eldest fighters were as war-torn as he was.

Tommy took a deep breath in and forced his body to relax. Fuck, he needed to calm down.

A cry caught his attention, a tiny chirp of a sound he barely noticed through the walls around him. Tommy stilled. He heard it again, a wailing that sounded not quite human. Tommy shoved his way into the closest building and held out a torch.

The cries led him deeper into the house until he reached a crib shoved in the farthest corner. Inside lay a baby, eyes red and cheeks pink from crying. Tommy instinctively picked up the kid and started to rock it, mimicking what he'd seen Wilbur do for Fundy when he was still little.

It kept crying.

Tommy racked his brains for something to calm the kid down. What were the five s's again? Sway and shush and... and something else, right? Fuck, it wasn't like he could sing to it or anything.

The kid kept going, and Tommy started to look a bit closer to see if it was injured or something. Upon first glance, it looked human, but a second go revealed skin and hair that were a bit too blue and ears with leafy tips.

A hybrid, huh? Wonder what made you? Tommy thought.

He kept swaying the kid, dancing around the room that it had been left in. Tommy rubbed his hand on its back, and eventually, the child stopped crying.

Tommy's arms were aching from holding up a sword and a baby, and the parents still hadn't come back. Thankfully, the kid was already asleep in his arms and let Tommy walk out of the house without a problem.

Tommy approached the first villager he saw, the leatherworker he met on his first day, Egan. *"Do you know where this kid's parents are?"* It was awkward, signing with one hand that he still had to use to support the kid.

"Sorry, I don't speak sign language."

Tommy rolled his eyes. He carried around a book for this exact purpose, but his hands were pretty occupied. He pointedly looked down at the baby and back up at Egan.

He glanced at the baby and frowned. "If you're looking for help with the baby, you'll have to find Glyss for that. She's probably with the rest of the people that ran to the caves."

Tommy frowned and walked away. They couldn't have just told him where the parents were, instead he had to go on a manhunt for some chick named Glyss. What a stupid fucking name.

He wandered through the village, searching for the group that Sean must have led away from the fight. Ender, he just wanted to go home and sleep for years.

A few people were milling about the blacksmith's shop, talking in hushed voices. Tommy couldn't care less for social etiquette—he was tired of carrying this baby around.

He knocked his sword against the smith's wall, flinching at the clang that rang out. Ender, he had forgotten how piercing netherite sounded.

"*Glyss?*" Tommy finger-spelled, hoping that a few of the villagers in the crowd would recognize what he was saying. No one said anything.

Fucking hell. Tommy rolled his eyes and was about to step away when one of the villagers shouted, "Glyss, I think someone needs you!"

A woman dashed around the corner. "Someone called for me?"

Glyss, Tommy presumed, looked about a decade older than Phil when he had last seen him, and looked much too clean for the state of the village around them. Tommy was pleased to see he was almost a foot taller than her.

"*Are you Glyss?*" He had to balance the book and write with one hand while holding the baby.

She nodded. "That's me. You're the new guy, right? Took over the old farm."

Tommy cringed at the use of "new guy" like he was a little kid at a new school. "*Yeah, whatever. Is this your fucking kid?*"

“Not exactly.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. What was with these villagers and being cryptic all the fucking time? *“What do you mean not exactly? Look, my arms really hurt, I just wanna get the baby to its parents.”*

Glyss winced. “She’s an orphan. I’ve been taking care of her.”

Tommy looked down again. The baby’s face still had tear marks from her earlier breakdown, and her little ears were flicking in her sleep, twitching to some stimuli. Surprisingly, she hadn’t woken up to Tommy’s sword. *“Why was she in your house alone?”*

“I evacuated with everyone else when the raid started.”

Tommy was not happy. *“You mean you left her just to save your sorry ass?”*

“Well,” Glyss started, “I was already on the edge of town, and I hoped—”

“Shut up,” Tommy cut her off with his hand, *“I’m not a big fan of people abandoning their kids.”*

Glyss’s stance took on a bit of edge. Tommy wasn’t good at ready expressions, but he could read a battle like nobody’s business, and she seemed ready for a fight.

“She’s not my kid.”

“Damn right she’s not. Is this about the hybrid thing? I didn’t think anyone was dumb enough to care about that kind of stuff anymore.” Tommy remembered how scared Tubbo had been when his horns grew in.

Glyss crossed her arms. “I don’t care. We just don’t know... *what* she is.”

Tommy scowled. “*What’s that supposed to mean?*”

“We don’t know what creature her father is. Her mother showed up on my doorstep one night in the middle of labor. She didn’t make it, well, you know how difficult hybrid births can be,” Glyss explained.

Unfortunately, Tommy did know. He still remembered the night he ran into Wilbur without that pretty redhead he’d been with lately, instead holding a bundle of something in his arms.

“*And why does it matter what her father was?*”

“Have you seen her eyes?”

Tommy was taken aback for a second. “*Her eyes? What, are they multicolored or some shit like that?*”

Glyss seemed to get angrier with every second Tommy had his mouth open. “She’s blind.”

“*And?*” Tommy seemed to lose some of his exhaustion arguing with her, arms aching.

“And, she’s a... a mistake! I’ve never seen a hybrid like that.”

“*Oh fuck off! So what, you were gonna let her die to some pillagers cause she’s a little blue?*”

Glyss took a step into Tommy's personal space, and every single one of his warning bells went off. The only thing keeping him from decking this bitch was the kid somehow still asleep against his chest.

"I could have died if I went back!"

"So your life is worth more than hers?"

Glyss scoffed. "What's it to you?"

"I told you, I really don't like it when people leave their kids."

"She's not—"

"Yeah, not yours, I heard you the first time. You wanna get rid of her so fucking badly? I'll take her." The words left his hands before he even realized the implications of what he was saying.

Glyss seemed stunned. "You mean take her permanently? How old even are you?"

"Yes, I mean permanently." Tommy elected to ignore the age question. Sure, he was seventeen, but he had a lot more life experience than most adults.

"You don't get to drop her off on my porch when you get tired after a few nights."

Tommy shook his head. *"Not gonna happen."*

Glyss took a step back. Tommy relaxed slightly. "Fine, she's all yours, new guy."

Well shit. That actually happened. Holy fuck, he had a kid. Glyss was halfway down the street when Tommy realized he didn't even know the kid's name.

"Hey, what the fuck do I call her? She got a name or something?"

Glyss shrugged. "I never got around to it, take your pick." And with that, she was gone.

Tommy looked at his newly adopted daughter and hummed, watching in wonder as she curled closer to his body. *What should we call you, huh?*

No one gave him a second look as he made his way back towards his house, the villagers were too busy cleaning the streets of soot and blood.

As soon as Tommy closed his front door, he sunk to the floor and lay the kid on his legs. Fuck, how heavy were babies? His arms hurt more than after training with Techno in Pogtopia.

The chaos and terror of earlier seemed to catch up with Tommy all at once, and he couldn't hold in a full body shiver. God, he had killed so many pillagers. There was still blood on his hands, and he'd gotten it on the blankets swaddling the baby. How did he think this was a good idea? Tommy could barely hold himself together, dancing on the edge of a mental breakdown every day, and he was gonna have to take care of another human.

For Prime's sake, he couldn't even talk, and the baby was *blind*. How did he think this was going to work out? Had Tommy just fucked up this kid's development? What if she never learned to speak?

Tommy let his head fall back and hit the wall with a thunk. He'd still been a kid himself when Wilbur raised Fundy, and he'd been more concerned with getting into trouble than babysitting. How was he supposed to raise a child?

Fuck , he thought, *Fuck*.

And with his new daughter curled up on his legs, Tommy fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

So this has been written in some form since like Feb, it was the second chapter I ever wrote for this. The first is yet to come ;)

But Tommy is a teenage father now! Whoopee! I'm sure this will only end in good things.

Also, the Lovejoy EP just came out and I am already obsessed. I snuck out of the house just so I could drive around and scream "FUCKING INCONSISTENT" at the top of my lungs. 10/10, would do again. Go check them out if you haven't (which I'm sure you have).

Thank you all so much for the huge support! I googled 1500 people and hooo boy there are a lot of you. It's just,,, so crazy to think there are people out there reading MY words at their kitchen table or somewhere, like something of my own creation is out in the world. It's the weirdest and the best feeling, and I wouldn't be here without y'all, so again, thank you for the love. <3

voice

Chapter Summary

voice - Index and middle finger touching the throat in a “V” shape

Tommy had never been more tired in his life.

Not when he was fighting in a war or hiding underground, not even when he was running for his life from Dream. Because then, he was keeping himself up for survival. Now, all Tommy wanted to do was sleep, but he couldn't.

Not when his newly adopted daughter wouldn't stop crying.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for being MIA! Check the end notes for more, and thanks for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Five days later...

Tommy had never been more tired in his life.

Not when he was fighting in a war or hiding underground, not even when he was running for his life from Dream. Because then, he was keeping himself up for survival. Now, all Tommy wanted to do was sleep, but he *couldn't*.

Not when his newly adopted daughter wouldn't stop crying.

The sun was starting to peek through Tommy's windows and he'd been holding his kid since it set. They were swaying around his kitchen to a beat only in Tommy's head, and his feet

were really starting to hurt. He would have sat down hours ago if it wasn't for the fact that the second his butt hit the chair that the baby started screaming. Ender, she had some lungs on her.

Tommy couldn't remember how many days it had been. Two, three? He hadn't left the house except to milk the cows in his neighbor's farm to make formula.

That had been... an experience.

He doubted that the mix of cow's milk, wheat flour, and sugar was anywhere close to the breast milk she needed, but she ate it without complaint and still seemed healthy. Tommy was just thankful her hybrid side didn't seem to need anything extra. Fuck, he had no idea what he was doing.

At the moment, his daughter's eyes were fluttering between open and closed. Tommy could tell she was trying to keep herself awake, and he had no idea how to soothe her to sleep. If they had been in the SMP before all the shit went down, he would have sung a song like Wilbur always did when Fundy had nightmares. But he couldn't anymore, and it was eating him alive.

Tommy was terrified. This kid hadn't heard a human talk in days. That had to mess up their development somehow, right? He was fucking up this kid's head, and he couldn't do anything about it.

The baby seemed to key into Tommy's distress and opened her eyes fully, ears twitching in response to something he couldn't hear. He knew she had elevated hearing, but to what degree, he couldn't tell. Her ears were almost funnel shaped and covered in a thick layer of organic matter that reminded Tommy of the teal trees that lived in the Nether, and they never stayed still.

Her chest was, well, a whole other matter.

Imagine Tommy's surprise when he went to change the blanket Glyss had considered "clothes" and sees his daughter start to fucking *glow*. If that hadn't made him scream, nothing

would.

The kid was glowing from the inside, a bright aqua color that would have made Tommy's eyes hurt if it wasn't muted from her skin. It looked like two or three nebulous shapes were trapped inside her ribcage, even wrapped around it, and they pulsed with an otherworldly light.

Tommy almost had a panic attack right then and there, his breaths growing loud enough to fill his ears, but the light started to dim and brighten to the same beat. Somehow, this tiny little kid was aware of his breathing and her organs were matching the same pace.

It was mesmerizing, watching his breaths reflected in such a beautiful glow, and Tommy calmed down without even realizing it.

And it wasn't until a minute or two later that Tommy realized she'd been asleep the whole time.

So when Tommy started to freak out again, it wasn't a surprise to see the blankets wrapped around his daughter glow a slight blue near her chest. He was partially mad at himself for waking her up, but his brain was running a million meters a minute and had already latched onto other self-destructive thoughts.

The kid managed to untuck her arm from the swaddle and grabbed a loose curl hanging in front of Tommy's face. She didn't look happy, exactly, but content. Tommy didn't understand how she could seem so calm when he was probably fucking up her life permanently.

Something inside him *ached*. Ender, he'd known this kid for days, but she was looking at him like... fuck, he didn't even know. Could babies this young understand love? Here he was, barely keeping himself together, but Tommy's daughter was smiling in his arms and playing with his hair, and he wanted nothing more than to be able to give her what she needed.

And then someone knocked on the door.

The baby's glow surged for a second and then calmed, and Tommy had to direct his attention to whoever was at the door.

Who was he kidding, Tommy knew it was Sean. He'd been stopping by twice every day, just a simple knock on Tommy's front door that didn't even match the rest of his house, *Ender*, what the fuck was he thinking, taking in a child, he was barely an adult, fuck fucking, he was gonna mess this—

“Tommy?”

His breath froze. The kid in his arms was wide awake now, eyes unfocused like always but ears angled towards the door and chest lit up like a bonfire.

“I— I don't want to intrude, but are you okay? I can hear you breathing heavily.”

Fuck. Sean didn't know he had a kid. *Sean didn't know he had a kid*. What was he gonna do, open the door with a baby in his arms and act like everything was normal and fine? But Ender, Tommy really wanted to sleep. He figured there was a reason that most kids had two parents to raise them, no one sane could stay up this long this much.

So Tommy's feet dragged him to his door on their own accord, and his arms joined the act and opened it.

Sean looked shocked, then relieved, and then extremely shocked again. There was a bag on something in his arms, and his hand was raised to knock on the door again, but they both dropped when his eyes locked on the kid in Tommy's arms.

“That is a child.”

Tommy nodded.

Sean couldn't stop looking at his daughter. Tommy could understand, he'd spent hours with his pinkie finger wrapped in hers just staring.

"Tommy," Sean started, "that is a child. You have a kid."

His hands were currently being used to support his daughter, so Tommy couldn't do much other than continue to nod. Honestly, he was kind of glad. What was he supposed to say in this kind of situation?

Sean ran his hands through his hair. "Why do you have a kid?"

Tommy just shrugged.

Sean walked into his house and dropped the bag on Tommy's table. He held out his arms.

"Here, let me take her so you can talk."

Tommy trusted Sean. He trusted Sean more than anyone in his life, Tubbo and Wilbur and all the rest of them included. Sean had never, *ever* given Tommy an inclination of ulterior motives, but every neuron that still worked in Tommy's brain was yelling at him to hold onto his kid and never let go.

Sean waited for a beat and dropped his arms. "Tommy, you've gotta work with me here."

So with a sigh, Tommy sat down by his kitchen chair and leaned his kid against his back, freeing up his hands. Sean slid into the seat next to him.

"It's a bit of a long story."

Sean looked like he wanted to laugh. “I think I might be worried if it was a short one.”

Tommy wrapped one of his arms around his daughter’s torso to stabilize her and used his other to shorthand sign.

“So, uh, it was after the raid, after we... after I yelled at you. Anyways, I heard some crying from a house and found her, apparently the woman looking after her left her to run away, and I got a bit mad. So I told Glyss— she’s the bitch that left a kid for pillagers— that I would take the kid. So I did. And I guess she’s my daughter now.”

Sean sighed. “Alright, at least you didn’t steal a child.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy said, but his heart wasn’t really in it. He still felt guilty for snapping at Sean the other day, and Ender, he really was about to fall asleep sitting up.

His kid had abandoned playing with his hair to focus on Sean’s voice, and Tommy could spot the moment that Sean saw the teal glow seeping through her blankets.

“She’s glowing.”

Tommy nodded, and started to bounce his knee slightly when his daughter started fidgeting.

“And she’s got leaves for ears.”

Tommy frowned. *“She doesn’t have leaf ears, dickhead.”*

Sean opened his mouth to shoot back a reply, but the kid giggled slightly, and he relaxed. “What’s her name?”

“What?”

“What’s her name?” Sean repeated.

Tommy glanced down in time to see her smile wide enough that her cheeks squished her eyes closed, and her light pulse in and out to Sean’s voice. His throat ached.

“Glyss said she didn’t have one, and I haven’t settled on anything, but I’ve always liked the name Clementine.”

Sean scooched his chair forward and offered his index finger for Tommy’s daughter to clutch. “Clementine sounds great.”

Clementine giggled again, happy to just play with Sean’s finger and soak in the sounds around her. Tommy couldn’t take his eyes off her.

Is this what Wilbur felt like?

Tommy always thought Wilbur was a bit crazy after Fundy’s birth, getting so attached to a kid he’d known for all of a few days. Looking back on it, Tommy was probably a bit jealous, considering Wilbur was the closest to a parental or big brother figure he’d ever had, and now this little ball of fur was taking up all of Wilbur’s time. But still, Tommy always had a bit of trouble understanding Wilbur as the same person that led armies and gave historic speeches to the guy that called his kid “little champion” and cried of happiness when Fundy finally came out.

Tommy got it now. Even though Clementine wasn’t his biologically, and even though he’d missed the first month or two of her life, he couldn’t remember what his life was like before her.

“How much do you know about kids?” Sean asked, “Not that I’m doubting your abilities, it’s just— I had younger siblings and I know how much of a handful—”

“It’s fine, Sean, you don’t have to explain yourself. And I, uh, was sort of an uncle? But that was a while ago, so I’d appreciate all the help I can get.”

Tommy gave Sean a shaky smile. He wouldn’t blame Sean if he just walked out of the house and never came back after what Tommy said to him, but he wanted Sean to stay. He wanted to try and apologize, to make things right.

Sean ran a hand through his hair. “Look, I’m sorry for what I said after the raid. You’re a better fighter than me by lightyears, and you had every right to fight. I just— I worry about you, because I care about you, and I don’t want to lose you. And it’s hard when I don’t know a lot about your past— that doesn’t mean I’m trying to pressure you into sharing, it’s just... difficult.”

“I’m sorry for yelling. I wasn’t in a great headspace after fighting, obviously. But you didn’t deserve what I said, and I know I’ve burned a lot of bridges acting this way, so I’m trying to do better because... well, I care about you too. And I’m sorry for expecting so much from you. I promise, once I have time in between caring for Clementine, I’m telling you more, and not because I feel obligated, but because I want to.”

And so it was all out in the open. Tommy felt like someone had drenched him in warm water and forced every muscle in his body to relax, even the little ones. His shoulders dropped, his jaw loosened, his leg stopped bouncing, and Tommy felt so much more tired, but in the best way possible.

Sean smiled. “You look happy, you know.”

“What do you mean?”

He gestured to Clementine. “I think I’ve seen you smile more at her in these past few minutes than you have at me in the months I’ve known you.”

Tommy’s hands moved of their own accord. *“She’s blind, by the way.”*

And Sean, too-good-for-this-world and literal angel Sean, just shrugged. “Honestly, not the most shocking thing you’ve told me.”

“I don’t think you get it, Sean. I can’t fucking talk. She can’t see.”

“We’ll figure it out. You’ll be fine.” He put a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. “She’ll be fine.”

Tommy nodded, sucking in a long breath to calm himself. *Okay*, he thought, *okay, I can do this.*

Sean stood up and clapped his hands. “First things first, Clementine needs some clothes. I’ll take care of that. I brought some food with me in that bag, but Ender, you need to sleep first. So, you rest, and I’ll figure the rest out. Got it?”

“Sean, you don’t have to—”

“Nope. I’m not hearing it. You are a single father that has been taking care of a child *alone* for five days, and I doubt you’re even a proper adult yourself. So, go to sleep, or I swear I will put you to bed like a little child and read you a story. *Got it?* ”

Tommy’s hands were poised to say something, but he couldn’t think of how to respond for the life of him. Sean took the rare opportunity to slip out the door with a goodbye.

And what else could Tommy do but listen? He was so tired his eyes were starting to close of their own accord, and thank Ender, Clementine seemed to be winding down as well.

Tommy made his way to the bed with Clementine in his arms and slipped under the blankets with her by his side.

Clementine curled into Tommy's body heat, but she was still fidgety, and the light in her chest had dimmed enough that Tommy couldn't see it anymore. He gently pet the dark fuzzy hair on her head and watched as it reflected a deep teal when the sun rays hit it.

Tommy tried to let his eyes close and slip into sleep, but Clementine kept fussing, eventually starting to cry. He groaned. The universe hated him, didn't it?

He tried the only thing that seemed to work, tapping his fingers on her back in a meaningless pattern. Usually, her chest would swell with light and Clementine would calm, but she continued to cry.

If he wasn't so tired, Tommy would have picked her up and gone after Sean to beg for help, but his limbs felt stuck to the bed. He didn't think he could stay awake in time to even look for Sean.

So, as any desperate new parent would, Tommy tried distracting Clementine in any way he could. Tapping, petting her hair, snuggling, anything he could think of.

Tommy was in the middle of lightly tickling her stomach when Clementine's face scrunched up and she stopped crying. He paused, holding his breath and praying to every god he could think of.

And then Clementine sneezed all over him.

Snot came flying out of her nose, splatting all over Tommy's face and the bed between them. It was an impressive amount, honestly, and in all the shock of the moment, Tommy laughed.

Clementine's chest lit up like a firework. She laughed along with him, a deep belly laugh he hadn't heard from her and wanted to engrave in his memories forever.

Surprisingly, Tommy's brain let him keep laughing. He kept waiting for his mind to catch up with his mouth and shut him up, but Clementine was giggling and glowing, and Tommy felt

relaxed. Fuck, he felt happy. And even his racing thoughts couldn't drown out the positivity of the moment swirling around them.

Tommy let his laugh trail off, out of breath and throat aching, but he felt stronger than he had in months. And so he kept his mouth open and hummed.

It was a simple tune, some song he picked up from Tubbo during the war against the SMP, but it was sound, and that's what mattered. Tommy kept up the melody, soaking in the way Clementine's light crescendoed with his voice.

Tommy's voice was gravelly from disuse, and he could feel his vocal cords vibrating in his chest. As much as it hurt, Clementine had stopped crying entirely, and her eyes were closed.

"Do you like my voice?" Tommy asked, holding in a cough. "I gotta say, you might be the first person to think that. Except maybe Tubbo, he said he liked my stories, but that was always Techno's thing." Tommy rambled on, letting his words rumble. He couldn't tell if it was just his sore throat, but his voice sounded lower than he remembered.

Soon enough, Clementine was asleep and Tommy wasn't far behind. He tucked his arms around her and pulled her close to his chest, relishing her touch. Tommy was far too tired and far too happy to freak out about the fact that he just spoke, and he was content to keep it that way. It was easy to let his eyes close and sleep alongside his daughter.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it's been a bit, y'all! I got my second shot of Moderna last week, and my symptoms were so bad I basically went into a fugue state for three days, and THEN I had to go to my sister's graduation. On top of all that, my meds are making it so I can't sleep, so I'm tired all the time. Anyways, sorry for dumping all that on you, just wanted to let you know what was up and where I've been. Updates /should/ be regular again, but life is crazy and sometimes things happen.

On another note, HOLY CRAP the support on last chapter was crazy. I posted it and went to bed, and I woke up to 55 notifications in my inbox. Y'all are actually the best. Shout out to those that comment every chapter, you know who you are, people like you are the backbone of this fandom, I hope you know how much you mean to people who

create. And thanks to anyone that commented for the first, third, or tenth time, even if it was something simple. Again, I read all the bookmarks I get, so if you're too shy to comment, I see you anyways!!

I love you guys, and I hope you all have amazing days, and I'll see you on the next one.
<3

please

Chapter Summary

please - The fingers of one hand touch the chin and move away from the body in a downwards arc (same sign as thank you)

“You know,” Misuko said, “when you disappeared for two months, the last thing I expected was for you to walk into my back room with a baby and a beard.”

Chapter Notes

I'm back, baby!! More in the end notes :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A month and a half later...

“You know,” Misuko said, “when you disappeared for two months, the last thing I expected was for you to walk into my back room with a baby and a beard.”

Tommy rubbed his scruff nervously, still not used to the feeling. Clementine was in his arms, still asleep from the ride on horseback, and barely visible underneath the coats and scarves Sean had wrapped her in.

Misuko rolled her eyes. “Come in, idiot.” She stepped back and let Tommy inside.

He took a seat at his normal stool and pulled out his book, well-loved and well-used. Everytime Tommy used it, he felt a bit guilty. Sure, he could speak with Clementine at home, but other people were a different story.

Even Sean still hadn't heard his voice, and not for lack of trying. It was like his throat closed up and sucked all the air out of his lungs before Tommy could even say a simple "hello". Honestly, he was sick and fucking tired of it.

So the book stayed in his pocket, and Tommy kept a smile plastered on his face every time he signed with Sean.

"Sorry for going MIA on you. I was a bit busy."

Misuko snickered. "Busy is a word for it."

Tommy shook his head frantically. *"Not in that way! Prime, Misuko, I'm only eighteen."* The words flowed out of Tommy's pen before he could think twice. Fuck, he hadn't even told Sean his actual age.

He waited for Misuko to gasp, to shout, to yell at him for being a dumb kid, but nothing came. Instead, she just rolled her eyes again.

"What was I supposed to think when you have a kid on your hip?"

Tommy paused for his racing heart, and kept up the conversation like he hadn't almost started a panic attack.

"She's not biologically mine."

"But she is yours?"

Tommy nodded.

Misuko pulled another stool next to Tommy's and sat down with a sigh. "Mind filling me in on how that happened?"

And so he did. He kept all the gorey and sad details in, knowing Misuko would just get mad at him for it, and told her everything from the pillager attack to his pitiful first week of being a dad. It wasn't until Tommy reached the part where he'd calmed down Clementine with the humming.

"Is that it?" Misuko asked, looking down at where Tommy's hands had paused above the paper.

Misuko wouldn't care. Tommy knew that, she didn't seem to care what he did as long as he wasn't bleeding over the floor in her backroom like the first time.

"I spoke to her."

Misuko's eyes widened, flicking between the book and Tommy's mouth.

He cringed, folding in on himself in a way that felt almost unnatural after months of recovery. Ender, he was such an idiot. Misuko wasn't going to be mad, she'd just be curious and nosy. Which wasn't /bad/, but questions required Tommy not answer, and he didn't know what he'd say. He didn't even know how he was speaking in the first place, for fuck's sake.

Misuko must have noticed some of his anxiety, and she snapped her mouth shut right after opening it to talk. She paused a moment, leaving Tommy in the worst awkward silence, took a deep breath, and started to speak again.

"Cool. Do you want to talk about it?"

The feeling of whiplash was oh so familiar to Tommy as he grappled with genuine support from one of his friends. And from Misuko, of all people. Tommy had sprained an ankle one

night and after complaining about it for hours, she almost forced him to walk home in high heels if he didn't shut up.

"I think so," Tommy said.

Misuko snapped her fingers. "Hit me with it."

"I can't speak in front of anyone else, and I don't know why. I don't know why I can at all. It's just Clementine."

Tommy looked down at his daughter fondly. She was still sleeping soundly, huffing little breaths as she dreamed. Something inside him ached and melted at the same time.

"How did you talk in the first place?"

"Clem wouldn't stop fussing, and I knew she liked sound, so I just... started humming. Once I knew my vocal chords actually worked, it was like someone opened the floodgates."

Misuko fiddled with her beer bottle, twirling it on its edge so it danced around the table in little circles. "How do you feel about it? Like, happy, sad, something else?"

"Nervous, I guess," Tommy said, *I'm just worried it will go away again, and I don't understand why I'm acting the way I am, and what is Sean going to think of all this?"*

"Fear of the unknown, huh? Guess it makes sense for a control freak like you. Why don't you try and work through something you can actually control? Telling all this to Sean doesn't seem that difficult— hell, just show him this page."

Tommy shook his head. *"But Sean and I grew close because of sign language, and I know he sees a bit of his deaf sister in me— I know that's not necessarily bad— but I feel like I would almost betray him if I could suddenly speak again."*

“Let me get this straight.” Misuko let go of the bottle and looked Tommy directly in the eyes. Her irises were just as dark as her hair, so much the color blended in with her pupil, and Tommy got distracted trying to find the edge between the two until Misuko flicked his forehead. “Pay attention, asshole. You want to talk, right?”

Tommy nodded.

“So talking would make you happy. Tommy, you must be the stupidest motherfucker to walk this earth if you think Sean would be upset about something that made you happy. The dude could watch you steal candy from a kid and ask about ‘your intentions’ and all that instead of smacking you upside the head like a normal person.”

Misuko made it sound like the simplest thing in the world. It was like a math equation— the transitive property, or whatever the fuck they called it. If Tommy was happy, Sean was happy.

Maybe it was that simple. But if Sean’s friendship wasn’t conditional, if it didn’t matter whether Tommy could speak or not, that meant there wasn’t much he could do to drive Sean away. That freedom, the vast infinite of possibilities, each ending with a smile from Sean and a promise of tomorrow, well, that frightened Tommy.

Months ago, he would have lashed out. Fought against infinity, searched for exceptions and boundaries to push. He already had. Sean had seen Tommy’s ugliest side, the part of him that looked at lava and blades and wished for a touch, and Sean didn’t leave. So Tommy went and stabbed some shit in the hopes that someone would stab back, whether emotionally or physically.

And now he was here, uncovering a deep, nasty, festering part of himself that could easily send the infection of self-hatred back to the beginning.

No fucking way Tommy was letting that happen.

“Okay. How do I tell him?”

Misuko shrugged. “Beats me. I still haven’t met him. Just sit down and explain it like you did with me. You’ll be fine.”

“How you ever managed to work in customer service amazes me.”

“Drunk men aren’t customers. They’re animals and I’m a farmhand— they’ll take what they can get.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “ *Do you never see a woman, or are they animals too? Because if you insult women I may have to clart you.* ”

Misuko laughed, open and clear. “Nah, I just flirt with the women and give them free drinks. They aren’t customers if they don’t pay.”

“Are you a woman enjoyer as well?” Tommy grinned as he wrote, falling back into his casual self easily.

“Is that what you kids call it these days? Sure, whatever, I’m a woman enjoyer.”

“That is simply amazing.”

Misuko snorted. “Yeah, yeah. Are you gonna go stab some things tonight? I can take care of Clementine if you’d like me to.”

“I’m going out, not for stabbing, but some other stuff. I can take Clem with me, but I’d feel better if she was here. You honestly don’t mind?”

She held out her arms. “If I minded I wouldn’t have asked. Besides, I grew up with way too many siblings, I know my way around a baby.”

“Please don’t phrase it that way.”

Tommy carefully transferred Clementine into Misuko’s arms, cradling her head and body. Somehow the kid was still asleep, even after hours of napping. Maybe the city had overwhelmed her senses? Whatever the case, Tommy was glad to let her sleep.

Ender, she looked so small in someone else’s arms. If he had to guess, Tommy would say she was around three or four months old, if he had to guess, but who knew with her hybrid genetics. Tommy remembered Wilbur sewing new clothes for Fundy every month because he grew too fast, and the last time they saw each other, Fundy looked older than him. Phil once claimed he met a guardian hybrid that was three decades old but was barely a teenager.

Tommy just hoped he would be there to see her grow up.

“I’ve got her, daddy-o,” Misuko teased, “Get out there and do what you need to do.”

Tommy grabbed his book and slipped it into his jacket, double checking he still had his bag on his back. He hesitated, glancing at Clementine again. Quickly, he kissed her forehead, slipped his mask on, and headed out the door.

It’d been a month or two since he’d been able to visit Callum and the other kids, and Tommy had spent any free moment gathering supplies. Between taking care of a child and sleeping, there wasn’t much time, but he did his best. Food, potions, simple weapons, even a few gapples— Tommy brought it all.

It was twilight, just dark enough for Tommy to slip through the shadows but early enough to avoid most of the trouble he normally sought out. He stayed off the roofs this time, trying to avoid as much attention as possible.

The group of kids weren’t in the place Tommy had first found them, and the lack of trash meant they hadn’t been in a while. If they were smart, which most street kids were, they’d move every few days or so. It just meant Tommy was going to have a long night.

He started to search in a radial pattern, fanning out from the original point in the hopes that they hadn't strayed far. Hours later, long enough that the moon was high in the sky, and Tommy knew he couldn't just keep blanket searching.

So, Tommy hopped back onto the roofs and tried to put himself in the mindset he used to have: looking for criminals. As much as Tommy knew better and *hated* the misconception, the homeless tended to hang out in the same area as thieves and drunks. It didn't help that the latter were likely one paycheck away from living on the streets themselves.

It was a messy, messy world, one full of politics and societal norms that Tommy did *not* have the energy to pull apart and fix, but he could do something to help. So, he roamed his normal spots and kept an eye out for unusually short homeless people.

After guiding a pair of very drunk men to a spot on a lit street where they hopefully wouldn't get robbed down to their underwear, Tommy ducked his head into a side street. He almost moved on, only spotting a person or two leaning against the brick walls, but heard something that made him pause.

Coughing.

That in itself wasn't rare, it was easy to get sick when you didn't have a roof to block the rain and the wind, but Tommy couldn't see the person it was coming from. That meant there were more people tucked away somewhere.

Callum had mentioned his friend had a lung infection. And the people he could see weren't exactly tall...

Tommy hunched his back slightly and pulled the hood of his cloak up. His footsteps barely made a sound against the cobblestone as he slipped into the alleyway and followed the sound of coughing. No one paid him any attention.

Sure enough, the alleyway ended at a slightly ajar trapdoor in the ground. Tommy opened it to reveal a staircase leading down into what looked like a basement. He headed down and closed the trapdoor behind him.

Sure enough, Tommy entered a tiny basement almost filled to the brim with kids. A couple glanced his way when he entered and started to whisper. In seconds, the whole room was staring at him, and the coughing quieted.

Tommy glanced around and pulled out his book.

Is Callum here?

One of the older kids, someone close enough to Tommy's age to make him uncomfortable, stepped up.

"Who's asking?" Their voice didn't waver.

Tommy slipped off his mask and rolled his eyes. *I'm not with Beth or any of those dickheads. Just here to help.*

The coughing started again, loud and sharp in such a small room, and Tommy looked harder at the dark corner that it came from. A girl around Callum's age was curled up on the ground, wrapped in a blanket so that nothing but her head showed. She was pale, too pale, and Tommy hoped the blue tinge in her lips was just from the light.

The older kid started to talk again, but Tommy held up his hand and grabbed one of the health potions from his bag. At such a strong consistency, it glowed red— or rather, shined as if someone had mixed in diamonds.

I've got medicine for his friend.

No one stopped him as he dropped his book and walked towards the sick girl.

She was delirious enough to not ask who Tommy was when he crouched next to her, simply leaning into his body heat despite the waves of fever rolling off her. Each cough racked her body, but the body tremors he missed from far away were even worse. She couldn't stop shaking, and Tommy could see her pain telegraphed in the wave of tensed muscles that came every other second.

He uncorked the potion and held it to her lips. She opened her jaw and tipped her head back; Tommy wondered how many potions she'd taken for the movement to be muscle memory, and then he wondered how many of them were real or just water with dye mixed in.

The potion slipped down her throat easily, and Tommy could see the effects take place instantly. She would need a regeneration potion to actually heal any of the root problems, but he wasn't about to let her die in the time it took to kick in. Instant health was a bitch to use, but it saved lives. It had saved Tommy's too many times to count.

The girl relaxed against the wall, her tired muscles falling limp the seconds they could, and she stopped coughing. Her skin was still practically the color of milk and warm to the touch, but Tommy was confident she wouldn't die in the next hour or so.

He mimed a writing motion with his free hand, and someone brought over Tommy's book and a pen. Murmurs filled the room, but no one spoke to him directly, and his hearing wasn't good enough to pick out anything.

Tommy scrawled a message out. *When was the last potion she took and what was it?*

"I— I'm not sure," the older kid said, "You'd have to ask Callum, and I have no idea when he'll be back."

Any in the past 24 hours?

“I don’t think so. Yeah, no, none in 24 hours.”

Someone grab me a regen and water breathing potion from my bag. All the rest of the stuff in there, food, weapons, it’s all yours. Go wild.

A few kids dashed over to his bag and opened the drawstring. Potion bottles and wrapped up food came gently tumbling out, and the murmuring rose to exclamations.

“This is ours?”

“Wait, really?”

“Oh my god, that’s pumpkin pie.”

“What?!”

Tommy just jabbed his finger at the last part of his message and gestured towards the stuff. Ender, these kids were too nice. If it were him, he’d have grabbed whatever his arms could carry and been halfway out the door.

Someone handed him the potions, and he turned away from the kids scavenging for food to focus on his patient.

The girl most likely had pneumonia or something similar, and the coughing and fever meant her lungs were filled with fluid. Fortunately, the water breathing potion would provide some relief for her immune system and get rid of some of the pain while the regen took effect.

First, Tommy dipped half of the regeneration potion down her throat and counted to ten. Then, he gave her just a few sips of the water breathing potion.

The regen would make its way through her bloodstream, attacking the infection and whatever damage it could find, but Tommy knew the lungs were hard to access. The body did its best to keep fluid out of the lungs, not in it, hence why it was so hard to heal lung infections and the like. If he didn't do more, the girl would likely have permanent damage.

Can I take off her shirt? I need access to her chest.

The older kid paused for a moment, glancing at the girl, and then nodded.

“Do whatever you need to do. She'd let you if she was awake.”

As much as Tommy hated invading the privacy of someone who couldn't give consent, he really needed to get the potion to her lungs. So, the permission of her friend would have to do.

Thankfully, a couple of kids had brought over a few blankets and a bedroll while Tommy was giving her the potions, so he set them up on the floor and moved the girl on top. Staying horizontal wouldn't be good in the long term, but it was easier for Tommy to access her lungs when her ribcage was flat.

He unwrapped her from the ratty wool blanket and set it over her legs. Tommy had planned to take her shirt off, but the thing was almost in scraps, so he felt no guilt taking a knife and slicing it down the center. He'd brought clothes, anyway.

Tommy tipped some of the regeneration potion onto her chest, forgoing a cloth or anything else for application.

“Why aren't you using a splash potion?”

The older kid had sat by the girl's beside and was watching Tommy work with a hint of fascination in their expression. Tommy was pretty sure they hadn't even gone to grab food.

Using his left hand, considering the right was massaging the potion into the girl's chest, Tommy said, *Regen is a powerful potion. It'll fix anything, and it'll fix what it finds first. If I used regen, it would heal her skin first, then muscle, then bone, if it makes it there. It's a surface potion, it's not meant to go deep. Normal regen will soak into her body until it's fully absorbed, and if I use enough, it'll reach her lungs. Now let me work.*

The kid just nodded in reply, thankfully, and Tommy poured more of the potion out. The girl's skin was turning a berry pink, but Tommy kept rubbing it in. He could see the little nicks and scars on her skin knit themselves back together with fresh pink skin. Something under his fingers snapped and clicked, and the girl sucked in a breath.

Has she broken a rib before?

The kid shrugged. "I'm not sure. Why?"

It healed wrong. It's fixed now, though. She might have some chest pain when she wakes up.

Tommy gently prodded her ribcage, feeling for any abnormalities the potion might have caused, but everything felt fine. With some luck and rest, she'd feel better than ever in a few days.

He shook out the last few droplets of potion and rubbed them in. Already, her breathing was a little less shaky and some color had returned to her skin. Tommy sat back on his heels and let a breath out.

There's more potions in the bag. If she gets worse again, apply them the same way I did. Got it?

The kid seemed to mentally pull himself together and nodded. "Got it."

Tommy cracked his fingers and rolled his shoulders out. Fucking hell, he was getting too old to sit on the ground.

Tell Callum I visited, and if he ever needs me, to go to Vaocluse's Viper and ask for help. Alright?

"I will."

Tommy patted him on the shoulder and stood up. The tiny cellar was full of noise, Tommy could easily say something without anyone else hearing, and something about that fact made him open up his mouth and speak.

"You did good. Go get some food."

It was barely a whisper, and Tommy's voice cracked like he was still fourteen, but the kid seemed to soak up his words like they were gold.

"Thank you," they said. There were tears in their eyes.

Tommy slipped back up the staircase and tugged his mask back on. The kids hanging out in the alleyway were gone, hopefully they had come inside during the commotion to eat.

The trip back to Misuko's bar was quiet and uneventful, and Tommy used the time to let his mind wander.

He wondered what his life would have been like if someone had taken care of him like that when he was younger. If he would have heard the poison lacing Dream's words when he invited Tommy, or noticed Wilbur's rapidly declining mental health before it was too late. There was a reason everyone on the SMP had a tragic past, missing family, broken relationships, amnesia, whatever trauma you could dream up—it was because Dream was charismatic, and he knew how to manipulate people looking for a home.

But, Tommy reasoned, there was no point in wishing for a different past. He'd made his choices, and he'd made them with good intent, and that was all he could ever ask for himself. Maybe now he could use his past mistakes to prevent others from making them in the future.

Misuko was still in the back room when he came in, swaying around the room with Clementine. Tommy smiled and raised a hand in greeting, but Misuko's face dropped the second he entered, and so did his heart.

"She hasn't woken up since you left," Misuko said— *that was hours ago*— "and I'm pretty sure she's burning up."

Tommy scooped Clementine into his arms and took in her symptoms while simultaneously pushing down his panic. Sure enough, her cheeks were tinged a deep purple, the same color she got when they were outside in the heat, and her eyes were squeezed shut in what Tommy hoped wasn't pain.

He didn't have time to pull out his book, so he simply mouthed a "thank you" to Misuko and rushed out the door.

It wasn't even dawn by the time they arrived back at the village, considering how fast Tommy pushed the horse, but he ran through the streets anyway, cradling Clementine to his chest.

The lights in Sean's house were dark, and his door was locked, so Tommy slammed his fist on the door. A few seconds passed, drawn out by the sounds of his heartbeat and short breaths in his ears. Nothing changed.

Fuck, he didn't know what to do. Clementine was getting better, and Tommy was freaking out, and Sean *wasn't waking up*. He couldn't do this by himself. Please, he needed help.

Tommy drove his fist into the wood again and again, praying that Sean would hear him. Nothing.

He sucked in some air, almost to the point of hyperventilation, and steeled himself.

“SEAN!” Tommy yelled, forcing his voice through his throat. Fuck, it hurt, and he had to keep himself from coughing, but he couldn’t stop. “SEAN! Wake up, I need you!”

The door flung open, and Tommy could've cried. Sean, in all his bed-headed glory, was standing there with a look of terror on his face and a stone sword in hand.

“Please,” Tommy whispered.

Chapter End Notes

So, it turns out sleep is a necessary thing and you cant just power through it lmao. The insomnia is still a problem, so updates are definitely going to be slower for now (thanks for being understanding). Re-reading yall's comments has really been a big help, so thank you <3

The one and only Ghost_Of_Vivi made us a playlist!!!! They recommended me a song a few weeks ago and I loved it, and they graciously took their own time to make this based around the fic. I haven't gotten the chance to listen yet, but I scrolled through and I am unbelievably excited to listen cause there's so many songs I haven't seen before. Sometimes I think fic playlists get a bit repetitive but not this one! They pulled out all the stops, so go send them some love and thanks in the comments.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5HafH3ojmgbw63gze5GXb9?si=yshm09cKQJ2wIo0m81J7PA>

Anyways, I thought yall had enough fluff so I thought I would throw some angst in to set up the next chapter. :) I also adjusted some of the time skips, so for reference, we are currently in late October, 2022. This chapter was affectionately called the "!"women!" chapter in my notes, and was written mostly to the album Splittsville by Teddy Hyde. Check it out!

Thank you all again, and lots of love and gratitude for sticking with me!!!! See you soon <3

family

Chapter Summary

family - Palm flat to the floor, fingers spread, and the hand moved in a horizontal circular motion, OR, Palm facing the floor, index and middle fingers arranged in a cross, and the hands moved in a horizontal circular motion.

"Please," Tommy whispered.

Sean seemed to cycle through a million emotions in a millisecond. Before Tommy could say anything else, Sean stepped away from the doorway and practically dragged Tommy inside.

Chapter Notes

This chapter has two descriptions for the sign "family". Often, signs can vary depending on your geographical location just like dialects do. Think firefly vs lightning bug or coke vs pop. Normally I go with the most used, but these seemed equal in popularity. The more you know!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Please," Tommy whispered.

Sean seemed to cycle through a million emotions in a millisecond. Before Tommy could say anything else, Sean stepped away from the doorway and practically dragged Tommy inside.

"Tommy, I can't help unless you tell me what's wrong," Sean said, pushing him into a seat and methodically checking him for injuries.

"Not me," Tommy choked, "Clem."

Sean took her out of Tommy's arms and felt her forehead with his hand.

"She has a fever, but it's not severe. She'll be okay, we just need to give her some potions, okay?"

"She wasn't waking up."

Sean unwrapped some of the scarves and coats wrapping Clementine up and placed her gently in Tommy's arms.

Tommy fiddled with her clothes, trying desperately just to do /something/. With Clementine's outer layers stripped, Tommy hoped her glow would be back to its full strength, but reality was much worse.

Clementine wasn't emitting light of any kind, and when Tommy pulled off her shirt, the organs by her ribs, normally teal, were a sickly lilac.

"*Sean!*" Tommy signed, but Sean's back was turned as he fiddled with Clementine's crib. Tommy snapped his fingers.

"Look at her chest."

Sean looked down and blanched.

"Has it done that before?"

Tommy shook his head. Sure, the glow lessened while Clementine was sleeping or tired, but purple? It matched her flushed cheeks, what would have been cherry red if she were human.

Sean ran his hand through his hair and sighed. “There’s not much we can do other than treating the fever and letting her rest.”

Tommy felt sick. This was his fault— not in that stupid self-pitiying way he used to think, but genuinely his fault. He’d had months to figure out what kind of a hybrid Clementine was, and he ignored the storm looming in the distance for a couple more moments of peace and quiet.

Was this what Phil felt like? Tommy knew Wilbur had sent him letters in Pogtopia, and there was no way he hid his decaying state of mind from his own father. But Phil had let himself stay in ignorant bliss until it was too late, and then he put a sword through the closest person Tommy had to a family.

He wasn’t going to be like Phil.

As soon as Clementine got better, because she would, Tommy would do everything he could to figure out what she needed.

“Why isn’t she waking up?” he asked.

"Her body is fighting back, it's making her tired. It's perfectly normal for a kid Clementine's age to sleep this much while sick. Now just hold on to her for a bit while I go grab some things."

Tommy nodded, a bit in shock after the terror of the past hour. Ender, he never wanted to see Clementine like this again.

Sean bustled around the house, grabbing a few potions and a water bottle. Tommy tried to distract himself by watching Clementine's eyelashes flutter and counting her breaths. He placed a thin blanket over her, too distressed by the purple.

The screeching of a chair brought Tommy back to the present. Sean was sitting in front of them, uncorking a few bottles.

"I don't even know how she got sick." If hands could murmur, Tommy's were. It felt like someone had sucked his energy out through his aching heart.

Sean shook his head. "Kids get sick. Don't blame yourself."

Tommy watched him tip a bottle of formula against Clementine's mouth. She hadn't fed in hours, considering she'd been asleep, and Tommy felt a bit guilty he hadn't noticed something was wrong earlier.

While Clementine didn't fully wake, her hands wrapped around the bottle and she lightly sucked the formula. Tommy sighed in relief.

"I need to know what kind of hybrid she is. I think it led to her getting sick." Tommy said.

Sean took a moment to think. "You know more about hybrids than I do. Is it that important?"

"I know an enderman hybrid, he can't drink water or cry without it hurting. My ne-- my friend, he's a fox hybrid, he couldn't sleep as a kid until we realized he needed something over his head to act like a burrow. Oh, and he almost died when we gave him chocolate. My other friend stunted the growth of his horns because he didn't take care of them properly."

"And you think something similar might be happening to Clementine?"

Tommy nodded. *"I'm almost certain."*

"Well," Sean said, "let's talk about it a bit more once she's feeling better. We should probably let her sleep in her crib."

Clementine's crib, hand-crafted by Tommy and a twin to the one in his own house, was nestled in the corner of Sean's living room. About a month ago, he'd insisted Tommy build it so he could get a good night's sleep every once in a while.

There weren't any blankets in it, which Tommy found extremely odd, but Sean mentioned something about it strangling Clementine in her sleep, so he kept it bare. Sure, Tommy wasn't the best with kids, but he had no idea how many random things could be dangerous for them. Thank Ender for Sean.

Tommy lowered Clementine into her crib and kissed her forehead. She already felt a bit cooler to the touch, but the flush on her cheeks hadn't subsided.

Sean placed a hand on Tommy's shoulder.

"Come on, she'll be okay. You can sleep here tonight."

Tommy didn't think he could take his eyes off his daughter, but Sean led him away and through the house to his spare bed.

Between his aching muscles and drooping eyelids, it was easy for Tommy to pull a blanket over himself and fall asleep.

Wilbur was sitting next to him. Tommy couldn't quite focus on his face, the little details swimming around in his vision anytime looked too long, but he couldn't miss the tattered jacket, curly brown hair, and rocket launcher tucked in his pocket. He couldn't smell smoke.

"Isn't she just the cutest thing?" Wilbur cooed, and he was holding Clementine in his lap.

Tommy nodded, sending his gaze over the scene of L'manburg in front of them. People were bustling around, carrying logs and planks for the reconstruction of the city. The crater had

already been filled in with water, thankfully, so the area wasn't such an eyesore. There were balloons in the sky.

Wilbur hummed as he let Clementine play with his thumbs, some tune Tommy hadn't heard before.

"What have you been up to without me, Tommy?"

Tommy opened his mouth to speak. Nothing. He closed it.

Wilbur laughed. "Cat got your tongue?"

Instead, Tommy raised his hands, ready to tell Wilbur off, but as soon as his fingers started to move, Wilbur turned his head away and focused on Clementine.

"If you think you have the right to talk to me after everything you did, at least have the decency to stop being a pussy and use your voice." Wilbur paused. "You do realize that's what it is, right? There's nothing wrong with your mouth or throat, or even your brain. It's because you're scared, Tommy, just like always."

Tommy had forgotten how much Wilbur hurt. It wasn't easy to fight back against someone who knew every nook and cranny of your soul and knew your brave was a facade. So Tommy stopped fighting.

Clementine was cooing, a gummy smile wide on her face as she reached towards Wilbur's face. She seemed fascinated with him, chest glowing like the galaxies in the night sky. She'd known Wilbur for all of a minute, and already, Clementine had heard Wilbur's voice more than her father's.

Tommy snapped his fingers, a surefire way to get his daughter's attention, but she didn't even pause.

Wilbur snorted. “As if Clementine would like someone that can’t speak. She’s blind, dickhead. What kind of a father are you?”

There was nothing Tommy could do. Wilbur had always outmatched him in arguments, even when Tommy could talk properly. Besides, it wasn’t like Wilbur was wrong.

“You know,” Wilbur said, too casual to be real, “the best decision I made as Fundy’s father was killing myself.”

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, pushing away the vision of a sword going through Wilbur’s gut. He didn’t want to open his eyes and see a ghost.

But something forced him to look, and Wilbur looked exactly like he did the day before he died, dusty, tired, but alive. Something in Tommy’s stomach clenched. *Ender, this was worse.*

Wilbur gingerly stroked the foliage that covered Clementine’s ears, more gentle than Tommy had seen him since Fundy stopped calling him Dad.

“If you really love Clementine, you should consider doing the same thing.”

And Tommy wanted to scream. Wanted to shout at Wilbur, dredge up all the poisonous thoughts he’d held down for years in fear of losing his brother.

You were the closest thing I had to a father, he would have screamed, if he could, and your death broke me in a way I don’t think I can ever heal from.

Tommy could have signed, but Wilbur was still facing away from him, focusing on Clementine, so he would have been speaking into the void.

Wilbur hummed again, the melody shifting between the eerie notes of Chirp and nonsense. Clementine *loved it*. Eyes wide, locked in on Wilbur's vibrating throat, and absolutely glowing with joy, literally and metaphorically.

"But we both know you're too selfish to go through with it— I mean, you've already tried *twice* and failed. Maybe it's just best if someone takes Clementine from you before you hurt her."

Tommy's heart stopped.

He was scrambling to his feet before he could even think, dashing towards Clementine with his arms outstretched. Wilbur still wasn't looking at him, he had a chance, he could grab her, run, go go go—

Tommy slammed into something, falling on his back while his ears rang. Wilbur didn't turn. Tommy scrambled forward, desperately trying to make that final millimeter so he could just get to Clementine.

His hand knocked into an invisible wall, snapping something in his wrist with a nauseating pain. Tommy's tongue bled as he bit into it, but he ignored the pain and reached out again, and screamed when he hit the barrier again.

"I'm just doing this for your own good, Tommy."

Wilbur got to his feet, his back to Tommy, so when he cradled Clementine to his chest and let her head rest on his shoulder, Tommy could see his daughter's face properly. She was crying, eyes screwed shut, but Tommy couldn't hear her, couldn't get to her, *couldn't reach*—

"See, you've made her upset."

Wilbur started to walk away.

“PLEASE!” Tommy was practically hitting himself with his hand, the one that wasn’t broken, desperate to be heard.

Wilbur sighed, voice growing farther away. “You never learn, do you?”

Tommy could only watch.

Clementine had stopped crying, thankfully, but had buried her head into the crook of Wilbur’s neck, and Tommy couldn’t see her face.

They disappeared over the horizon.

Tommy shot out of bed, screaming for Clementine. His hand *ached* something fierce, but he ignored it and dashed into the living room. There were blankets tangling his feet, and on Tommy’s way through the door, he tripped and fell into the wall. Planks cracked under the weight of his side, but he kept going.

Vaguely, he heard a door slamming open and shouts from somewhere else in the house, but he ignored them in favor of beelining towards Clementine’s crib.

Tommy scooped Clementine into his arms and collapsed on the floor. He almost gagged when he realized he was holding her the same as Wilbur. Quickly, he shifted them both so Clementine was on her back on top of Tommy’s thighs, reminiscent of the day he brought her home.

Thankfully, Clementine was already awake, and while she didn’t look happy, her normal teal color seemed to be returning.

Tommy brushed his fingers across her ribcage. Blue sprites trailed behind, following his path like bees to a flower. Clementine smiled, apparently enjoying their new game, and Tommy allowed himself to breathe.

The shadow of a figure entered the edge of Tommy's vision, and he stiffened until he realized it was just Sean, in pajamas and with a sword like a bad case of *deja vu*.

"Is she alright?" Sean whispered, still keeping his distance. Tommy wondered if he was radiating "spooked animal" vibes, like Sean teased him about.

"No wonder you wear that raccoon mask," Sean had said, one night when Tommy practically collapsed on his bedroom floor in the middle of the night, "I'm surprised you haven't started hissing yet."

Tommy shoved down his panic. "She's fine."

Sean tossed his sword away and sat down next to them. "Thank Ender. I heard you scream—second time tonight, may I remind you, and I thought..."

"Sorry."

"Do you wanna talk about it?"

And fuck, Tommy actually did.

"Have I mentioned Wilbur to you?"

Sean wrinkled his nose. "No, but I've heard of him. People say he blew up a whole city."

Tommy focused on the weight of Clementine on his lap, the slight dip in the floorboards from Sean's body next to him, the flickering of the dim torches outside.

"He was my brother."

Tommy laughed at the expression on Sean's face. *"Not biologically, but he was the closest thing I had to family, other than Tubbo."*

"Did he actually blow up a city?"

Tommy waved his hand. *"I'll get to that. Anyway, remember when I said we were fighting for our independence? Well, Wilbur was the one that started all that. We called it L'manburg."*

"Very European," Sean snorted.

"That was the point. We were fighting against the tyrannical Americans or some bullshit like that. So we made L'manburg, and I lost my first two lives in the war, but we got our freedom, and I thought that was that. But Wilbur wanted to hold a democratic election, something about making his rule official. More power, I guess."

It was easy to see how power hungry Wilbur had been once Tommy removed himself from the equation. Hindsight was twenty-twenty, as they said.

"We rigged it for our party but still lost, somehow. Schlatt, the new president, kicked us out right then and there. Wilbur died for the second time while we fled. He uh— he was never really mentally stable, but i think with—" Tommy gestured wildly, "everything, it got worse. He was... really, really bad. I don't like to call it abuse, but..." He shrugged.

"And?"

“And then he went full bat-shit crazy and blew up L’manburg, and then got his dad to stab him before the dust settled. To top it off, he came back as a ghost— one that didn’t have any of his bad memories— basically the idolized version of Wilbur in my head. The ‘perfect brother’. So that sorta fucked with me.”

Sean rubbed his forehead. “You never got to be angry.”

Again, Tommy shrugged. *“Sure. But I dreamt about him. He wouldn’t let me sign, called me a pussy. Told me to kill myself. Took Clementine away.”*

“Hence...” Sean gestured to Tommy’s lap, where Clementine was phasing in and out of sleep, chest pulsing to the sound of Sean’s voice.

“Yeah.”

Sean shifted so he was more comfortable on the floor, obviously gearing himself up for a longer conversation. “Do you mind if I ask questions?”

“Knock yourself out.”

“Yes or no, Tommy. I don’t care if you’ve wrapped yourself in a red carpet, I’m not gonna walk all over you.”

Tommy looked at Sean like he was crazy. *“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”*

“It’s,” Sean sighed, “it’s something my mom used to say. Just— do you want to keep talking about it or not?”

Tommy paused. This was different. He’d given up the necessary information, he’d told Sean what he needed to know. *This* was more. Ender, there were stories upon stories that he desperately wanted to share. He wanted to talk about all the times Tubbo fucked up a

sentence and said something stupid, about Wilbur and him laughing while they named L'manburg, about Fundy's voice cracks when he hit puberty. But with the good came the bad, and it felt like if Tommy shared too much about himself, there wouldn't be anything left to walk away with.

Fuck it.

Wilbur said he was scared. He wasn't fucking scared.

"What do you want to know?" Tommy asked, eyes locked onto Sean's and hands still as they pet Clementine's peach fuzz.

"You said Wilbur was like your brother?" —*don't say that, I'll cry*— "When did you meet him?"

"He always carried his stupid fucking guitar with him, and I stumbled upon him busking in..."

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU FOR 2000 KUDOS HOLY SHIT YALL ARE THE BEST

So, I think I may have discovered the trick to my sleep schedule. I was trying to fight it, but if I just let it happen and sleep in two four or five hour chunks, I'm good. We'll see how it goes :)

I have officially binged the Vibrations playlist. Can conclude, great vibes (pun intended). It's actually really great to write to, which isn't common, and something I totally didn't expect, but super useful and just really, really nice. Anyways, go listen to it or else <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5HafH3ojmgbw63gze5GXb9?si=51f6d7860eda4ec7>. Thanks again, Ghost_Of_Vivi <3

I feel like my end notes keep getting longer and longer cause I wanna share stuff with y'all. I have a twitter, but I mostly just use it to scroll, but I'd be interested in tweeting a bit to keep yall updated on the story and general life things. Would yall like to see something like that? I'd love to hear your thoughts. Anyways, much love as always <3

plan

Chapter Summary

plan - Left index and middle finger touching the right palm in a V shape. Both arms twisting at the elbow to rotate the hands in a half-circular motion.

Right now, Tommy desperately wanted to shower, to sleep, and to find someone that would give him a straight fucking answer so he could head back home to his daughter.

Chapter Notes

I bringith words. Enjoy, my friends.
also this was the HARDEST FUCKING SIGN TO DESCRIBE

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Twenty-nine days later...

Right now, Tommy desperately wanted to shower, to sleep, and to find someone that would give him a *straight fucking answer* so he could head back home to his daughter.

He slammed the door on what felt like the thousandth bar that night and set off down the street. The moon was high in the sky, marking the fact that Tommy had been searching for too fucking long, in his opinion. His hands were covered in a slimy combination of oil, alcohol, sweat, dirt, and soot.

“Fucking dickheads,” Tommy muttered, adjusting the pack on his back and shoving his way into another bar, just as grimy as the last one.

The noise was paralyzing, but Tommy had just about had it tonight, so he gritted his teeth and pushed his feet forward with the power of sheer spite.

His hands were sore from writing for hours, but they itched to have a conversation, a *proper* one, just so he could complain about all the shit he'd put up with tonight.

First, he'd been kicked out of any of the inns he tried to visit when they realized he wasn't booking a room. The owners had taken one look at his clothes and hair, now reminiscent of Tommy's street kid days, and kicked him to the curb. Arseholes.

After that, he tried his luck with a couple stores and bars. It turns out most people aren't willing to "speak" to a kid that could only talk with a pen. Tommy had to restrain himself from punching the third person that shouted and exaggerated their words like he was deaf.

The bars got dirtier and dirtier the further he travelled and the older the night got. Tommy narrowly avoided a jet spray of projectile vomit at one and dipped, chalking it up to a loss.

And the last, well, some old guy said that Tommy had pretty enough lips to— Ender, he didn't even want to think about it.

Tommy flipped to a specific page in his book, one where he had written out a meticulous message, and approached the first table.

It looked like a group that had just come back from a hunting mission. Tommy could smell the blood. Their conversation paused as he approached, and piercing eyes followed him like he was another piece of prey. Tommy rolled his shoulders back and reminded himself he wasn't the boy that got walked all over two years ago. He was tall, he'd filled out his stature from farming and fighting, he had a beard, for Prime's sake. He wasn't a child.

Tommy tossed the book onto their table and let them read.

"You're looking for a mob?" One asked, spinning the book to face him.

Tommy nodded.

He'd written out a description of all the traits Clementine seemed to inherit: blindness, glowing chest, teal skin, leafy ears, sensitive to sound, anything he thought was important. If someone was able to sex with the mob— and fucking hell, he did not want to envision that— than someone else must have encountered it as well.

So far, no dice. Tommy had even scrawled an offer for a free drink in exchange for information at the bottom of the page.

“Sorry, kid, never heard of anything like that. Closest thing I can think of is a glow squid.”

Tommy was going to murder every single glow squid in the world. The amount of times he'd heard that just tonight— Clementine had leaves on her ears, no fucking tentacle. Ender fucking Prime.

Deep breaths, Tommy.

He shook his head and glanced at the rest of the table. No one spoke up. At least they were cordial about it.

Tommy picked up his book and headed to the next table, trying his best to shove down his paranoia. *Of course they're looking at you, idiot, you're a stranger acting weird.*

The next group was far too drunk for Tommy's taste, he'd learnt that lesson just a few minutes ago, so he ducked under a barmaid's platter and veered right.

The table he approached was so loud most of the members, mostly miners, it looked like, didn't even notice Tommy's approach. That was, until, the burliest man Tommy had ever seen slammed his mug on the table and shouted, “Carlson, Newman, stop bickering like a couple of divorcees, we've got a man looking for a seat!”

A little surprised and slightly on edge from the loud noise, Tommy gave them a little wave. He then almost hit himself upside the head, because what was he thinking, waving like a little school girl lost on her way home. *Dumbass*.

He passed his book to the man and crossed his arms before he did something even stupider.

The man took a moment to read everything, his eyebrows raising in semi-shock by the end, and handed the book back.

“Well son,” the man clapped his hands and grinned, “I believe you owe me a drink!”

Five minutes and the tallest glass of whiskey Tommy had ever seen later, someone guided him to a seat across from Burly Man and clapped him on the shoulder.

“Call me Henderson,” the man offered, “If you’re looking for a Warden, you’ve come to the right place.”

A Warden? Tommy asked.

Henderson glanced between Tommy and the book. “Are you deaf, son?”

Tommy bristled. *No, is that a problem?* He just couldn’t catch a break, could he?

Fuck, he missed Sean. Caring, compassionate, *understanding* Sean. It wasn’t until days later after Tommy’s dramatic nighttime visit that Sean asked him about the whole talking thing. Tommy had actually forgotten at that point, and with the relief of Clementine getting better, he’d laughed it off.

“Just sorta happened, I guess,” Tommy had said, “Are you mad?”

Sean, who was currently burping Clementine after a meal, the absolute angel, looked at Tommy like he was the dumbest motherfucker to ever live. And that was that.

It got easier to trust. Tommy wasn't constantly on edge, waiting for the moment he finally pushed Sean too far. And man, Tommy had never felt more energized. Who knew constant anxiety could make you so tired all the time?

When Clementine was well enough for Tommy to head out, he didn't panic about asking Sean to take care of her, and Sean responded with an, “Of course,” and Tommy felt that last weight leave his shoulders.

So now, faced with the biggest fucking man Tommy had ever seen who was possible about to deck Tommy for being deaf, he was a little homesick.

Henderson looked back at Tommy, obviously sizing him up and taking note of the sword around his waist, and just shrugged.

“Thought it was a bit ironic, someone deaf looking for a blind mob.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. *Haha. Now what's a Warden?*

Henderson put his forearms on the tabletop and leaned forward like he was about to tell Tommy a secret. The man was still smiling, and Tommy was close enough to see the several gold cavities dotting his molars.

“Have you ever heard about the deep dark?”

Tommy shook his head.

“There are parts of the world, you gotta go far out to find ‘em, that reach deeper than normal. They’re rare, but chock full of minerals. If you’re a miner worth your salt, you’ve been to at least one. Now, in these areas, there’s a chance you’ll run into the deep dark. No light, tiny tunnels, and the weirdest fucking plants you’ve ever seen.”

Henderson grabbed Tommy’s pen and started to sketch a rough shape on an empty page.

“The ground is a dark teal... something— it feels spongy and oozes this dark liquid when you step too hard. And on it grows these leaves and stems, teal, just like the ground. When you break a block or walk near them, these weird teal lights appear and are sucked into the plant. Creepiest fucking thing I’ve ever seen. They started giving me blindness and I got out of there as fast as I could.”

Tommy wanted to ask what this had to do with the Warden, but Henderson still had his book and was scribbling wildly.

“I’m glad I did, or might not have lived to tell the tale. There are rumors, the ones that miners whisper when they’ve had too many drinks and don’t believe when they’re sober. But not everyone has seen what I’ve seen.”

Henderson flipped the book around towards Tommy. There was a sketch of a mob, fairly well done, in fact. Its stature looked similar to an iron golem, but that’s where the similarities stopped. The thing didn’t have eyes, only a gaping mouth. It had two ears— or were those horns?— that looked like stems, covered in doodled foliage.

“My friend went to check out the cave a few days later. He didn’t come back up. When we went down to get him, he was adamant that someone get him a pen and paper. Before he succumbed to his injuries, he managed to draw what attacked him, and by Ender, it was the most terrifying thing I’ve ever seen. This is my best rendition.”

Its chest looked like a black hole surrounded by a ring of exposed ribs, and there were a few blobs scribbled inside.

What's that? Tommy asked, drawing an arrow to the shapes.

"The best way I can describe it is... well, they looked like glowing souls trapped inside the creature."

That was horribly familiar.

Tommy took in the rest of the drawing— the exposed bone in the arms, unnaturally spikey, the club-like hands and feet, the hulking muscle mass of it all. It looked like a proper monster.

How did your friend die?

Tommy really didn't want to know, but he had to, because this mob was undeniably what Clementine came from, and he wasn't going to fail her again.

Henderson grunted. "It was quite brutal, honestly. 'Said the thing slammed him into a wall. His ribs shattered, first from the Warden, second from the stone, and one pierced him straight through the heart. The only reason he stayed alive so long is because it happened so quickly and violently that the bone plugged the wound. The fucking thing left him to die— and it knew he was still alive. It wasn't hunting, it was killing for sport."

Ender, the universe must have been watching Tommy and laughing.

Do you have the coordinates to the cave?

"What?" Henderson snorted, "I'm not gonna send someone to his grave cause he thinks he can take down the big, bad monster and get famous."

Ender, what was it with people and thinking that he had a hero-complex. Fucking hell, there was nothing Tommy wanted more than to take care of his daughter and never face the rest of the world again.

I'm not stupid. Tommy let his scowl show. *I'm not going to try and kill a Warden.*

"Then you don't need the coords."

I can handle myself.

"I don't doubt that. But I'm not going to have another death on my conscience," Henderson said.

Tommy gritted his teeth. *I'm not going to die.*

"Look, nothing you can say will convince me to give you the coordinates. Thanks for the drink, but I think it's best if you head out now."

I need to—

Henderson slammed Tommy's book shut on his hand, a scowl on the man's face.

"You're pushing it, kid."

Tommy, really, really wanted to punch him. He'd been eighteen for /months/, for Prime's sake. And Henderson was just another asshole trying to get under his skin and demean his character by calling him a child. Wilbur, Dream, Techno, Phil, the whole lot of them. And sure, maybe he was actually a kid then and proved them right when he fought back, but he'd grown. Tommy was actually, truly, unquestionably not a kid anymore, because he knew when to back off and wait to play his hand.

He slid the book back into his pocket and got up from the table without a word, eyes down like a beaten puppy. Henderson grunted and turned his focus elsewhere, and that was all Tommy needed to know he wouldn't cross the man's mind again. Tommy was, for all intents and purposes, a kid that got frightened and ran away.

Tommy fought in wars. He knew when to retreat.

So once he was out of the bar, he slipped his mask on and climbed onto the roof of the building across the street.

It only took about an hour for Henderson and his merry band of highly intoxicated miners to stumble their way through the doors. Fucking hell, with the noise they were making, a blind rat could've tracked them.

Henderson had another man's arm across his shoulders, supporting his weight, and looked more sober than the rest. He also had a wicked looking pickaxe on his belt that Tommy hadn't noticed earlier. Netherite.

If Tommy hadn't been currently hiding on a roof, he would have whistled. The tool, although it could certainly be a weapon, was sharpened to a razor-thin point Tommy had only ever seen on obsidian, and it shined with enchantments. All that, and it just hung from a simple leather strap, swinging with Henderson's every step. Tommy winced— he'd take someone's fucking eye out like that.

Praying to whatever sick gods above that the pickaxe wasn't another Chekov's gun or whatever the fuck Wilbur went about, Tommy followed the group.

It took them an unholy *seventy fucking minutes* to walk the mile to the edge of the city. Tommy's brain took the downtime and ran with it, sending him into daydreams every other minute that reiterated how homesick he was.

He missed Sean, he missed Isla, he missed Jill. Ender, it felt like Tommy blinked and she grew a foot and aged five years. Jill and her family had been there to say goodbye and wish him luck, but Jill had been easily distracted by another kid and ran off as soon as she could.

She couldn't fit in his lap anymore.

It wasn't Jill's fault; Tommy had been fighting in far cities and then taking care of an infant. Kids grew, that's how it worked. He knew that.

Surprisingly, it didn't hurt as much as Tommy thought it would. Well, maybe not, but the hurt was less than the pride he felt when he saw her skipping home from school, drawing in hand.

Nothing ever really stayed the same.

Even Clementine was already bigger, although Tommy was now realizing that might have something to do with her hybrid side. Considering, you know, she shared the genetics with a mob taller than an iron fucking golem.

Henderson and his buddies stopped at their camp, a temporary thing just a few meters outside the city walls.

The men settled down quickly, opening and closing tents and putting out their torches. In just a minute, the whole place was silent.

It was eerie, but a definite improvement from the out of tune sea shanties they'd been singing minutes ago.

Tommy settled into a nook conveniently cut into his current roof and tried to relax. It was going to be a long night.

As someone with a pretty indie and alt music taste (as I know a lot of you do) I am begging you, please listen to Olivia Rodrigo's album. I almost wrote it off as another uninteresting pop release. It's not. I want to eat her lyrics for breakfast for the rest of my life. Her bridges. Just. Please. (Also listen to Bo Burnham's Inside).

Did Vivi know what they were doing when they put Persephone, Now You Know, and Fly in My Room all in a row on the Vibrations playlist? Did they know that would be all I listened to on loop for two days? Did they know they created a masterpiece? I think not.

Also, here's my twitter! ~ @celest_warden ~ Feel free to follow! I currently have one (1) tweet, and the only followers I have are from bootwt prom because I am slightly scared of having an internet presence but we're working on that haha. I'll probably just tweet about the fic and random stuff, and I mostly follow meyt cc's and artists. IF YOU HAVE ANY FANART OR ARE THINKING ABOUT DOING FANART, I LITERALLY TAKE THAT AS ONE OF THE HIGHEST COMPLIMENTS EVER. PLEASE. SEND ME ANYTHING YOU'VE MADE, I GUARANTEE I WILL LOVE IT. THANK YOU.
<3

dark

Chapter Summary

dark - Both hands, palms facing inward, moving from an upright position to crossed and horizontal in an arcing motion.

Well, Tommy got the coordinates.

Chapter Notes

Ahaha, ay, it's ya boy... uh... skinny penis...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Thirty hours later...

Well, Tommy got the coordinates.

He'd been up for over a day, tracking Henderson's group to their mine tucked away in the mountains and waiting for them to go back to the city at sundown.

He also didn't really get the coords, per say, but wandered deeper into the mines until he stumbled upon a glowing sign labeled, "DANGER."

But, Tommy was here, and he hadn't been picked to pieces by a bunch of miners, so he counted it as a win. Well, if you could call probable mortal peril a win.

Tommy shoved the DANGER sign to the side and inspected the barricade they'd put up to block the tunnel. It was mostly made of deepslate bricks, a block Tommy had recently

discovered and quickly came to hate. Nothing could replace cobble in his heart.

There weren't any holes between the bricks; whoever had constructed the wall hadn't wanted *anything* to get through. Thankfully, Tommy had a diamond pick and too much adrenaline in his blood, considering it was the only thing keeping him awake.

He dug his pick into the bricks and started the slow process of tearing down the barricade. Each hit rang through the mine like a bell going off, but most of it was already lit up, and the miners had been gone for hours.

Eventually, Tommy cracked through the last layer of brick and exposed a cave as black as the void. It almost felt like the darkness was seeping through the tiny space, dimming Tommy's torch and the ambient light.

He pushed his paranoia away and kept digging.

The bigger the hole became, the easier it was to wrench bricks loose from the wall, and soon enough, Tommy had created a passageway.

Shield in one hand and sword in the other, Tommy stepped into the dark.

It felt like waking up in exile, opening his eyes and expecting the bright light of day, but met with the deep blanket of the ocean. The darkness was suffocating. He couldn't even see the hand holding his torch, for Prime's sake.

"For Clementine," Tommy muttered. He scanned his hotbar, making sure his water bucket, potions— all of his fighting equipment were in their proper slots. Ender, he hadn't felt this nervous since the duel with Dream. There was something about knowing the danger you were willingly walking yourself into that made it that much more terrifying.

Tommy headed down the cave, footsteps light in leather boots, and kept his eyes ahead.

The ground slowly turned spongy underfoot, stone into... something else. It was dark, the color indistinguishable in the light, and had fern-like plants growing on top. With each of Tommy's steps, they glowed bright cyan and swayed in the non-existent breeze.

Tommy kneeled down, brushing his fingers against the ferns. They felt exactly like the vegetation growing on Clementine's ears, just on a larger scale. Tommy plucked a leaf from one and slipped it into his pocket.

He didn't notice the blindness effect at first.

It wasn't until Tommy glanced at his torch and noticed the light pulsing in an eerily familiar way that he realized something was wrong.

Shit. Fuck. Fucking shit. Ender, he'd just walked into this without a plan, had he learned *anything* from Dream?

Tommy tiptoed to his right and placed his back against the wall. All he needed to do was see the Warden, figure out what it needed— how it worked, and then run like the fucking wind towards the exit. Hopefully, since the thing was blind, he could just stand very... very still and it wouldn't notice anything. Hopefully.

And so he waited, praying that his heartbeat wasn't strong enough to sense, or the movement of his lungs as they inhaled and exhaled at a rate that probably wasn't healthy. Could he move his eyeballs? He could probably move his eyes. Right?

It didn't matter, because everything in Tommy's body froze the second the Warden stepped into his limited vision.

Ender fucking Prime, it was *massive*. Henderson's drawing didn't do it justice. The thing seemed to suck the light out of the air and into the glowing souls on its chest. *Souls*, for fuck's sake. The Warden's ribs were growing out of its skin, open and broken off to expose the bright organs inside. They looked like they were screaming. Tommy felt sick.

The worst part of it all was the heartbeat.

Every instinct in Tommy's body was at war, one side screaming at him to stay still and the other begging him to cover his ears. He was paralyzed. The heartbeat didn't feel like a sound, it felt like a movement, as if the Warden was in the walls and floor around him, its blood vessels twisting and snaking by ores to play the rhythm like a symphony. It was everywhere, and it was *loud*.

Somehow, Tommy stayed still.

The Warden paused in front of Tommy, turning so its eyeless face pointed towards him. He held his breath.

Everything stilled.

Squeak.

Tommy flinched.

The Warden tilted its head.

Squeak.

A bat flew above them, apparently unaware of the mortal danger it had put itself in. The Warden followed the bat's movement impeccably.

And then Tommy noticed the particles in the air.

With every sound the bat made, little teal waves appeared in its place and were sucked towards the now glowing ferns. On top of that, the Warden seemed to have the exact same effect. Bright particle, drawn in towards its horns which started glowing the second it made contact.

That's how it could see. Whatever technology or biology the plants used to sense sound, the Warden had the exact same thing. On top of that, it looked like it was almost using the plants to extend its vision in range and strength.

Clementine needed those plants. She's meant to live down here, in the deep dark, where the glowing plants can guide her sight. Tommy wondered if that's how she got sick, from straining the soul-like organs in her chest in order to "see".

Alright, so Tommy just needed to grab a few plants and get the fuck out of here. Easy.

Like a viper, the Warden swung one of its arms into the air, and its club-like hand slammed into the body of the bat, killing it instantly. Tommy could hear its dying squeak echoing in his ears.

Okay. So, not the greatest situation he'd been in. But he could do this.

Watching the Warden from the corner of his eye— who currently seemed to be wandering aimlessly without any vibrations to follow— Tommy switched to the stack of ender pearls in his hotbar.

All he had to do was throw a few pearls to get to the exit and grab some plants on the way. The Warden, although terrifying, was slow and bumbling. Tommy could easily out run the thing, especially if he was teleporting.

Tommy took a few deep breaths, steeling himself, and pushed off from the wall.

Immediately, the Warden roared behind him and Tommy felt any smidge of bravery left in his body quickly and swiftly exit. He fucking *bolted* down the cave, pausing at a growth of ferns to rip them out of the ground, roots and all.

He glanced behind him— shit, it was closer than Tommy thought. Muscle memory pulled his bow out and flicked an arrow towards the Warden. It roared again, and this time Tommy could feel the walls of the cave rattle with the sound.

Time to leave.

Tommy switched to his ender pearls again and tossed one as far as he could. As soon as he landed, he threw another, and didn't stop running until he reached the exit.

Shit, he forgot the plants.

He turned back and ran to the edge of the fern growth, getting on his knees to rip them out of the ground. One, two, three were in his inventory when Tommy heard a rumbling and looked up.

Fuck.

The Warden's arm came smashing into his chest, knocking Tommy down completely and back a few feet into the wall. His lungs *burned*, which meant he definitely had broken a few ribs, and bets were that his skull was slightly cracked, despite the netherite helmet that sat atop it.

Ender dammit, that thing was way too fast to be fair.

There was no way Tommy could kill the Warden, much less keep it from breaking him into little pieces before he could escape.

Maybe he should have listened to Henderson.

The exit was *right there*. Just a few more strides and he would have made it, but now he was on the ground and the Warden was closer than the tunnel.

Fuck, everything hurt. It'd been a while since Tommy had been this injured, and he was starting to remember why it sucked so much. He really, *really* just wanted to close his eyes and take a nap. Were his eyes already closed? Tommy couldn't tell— the void was spinning.

Was he really going to die *here* , in a dusty cave that no one would find after he survived everything with Dream? He went through all that just to get his sht fucked by a mob? No way.

Tommy's lungs wheezed, and he saw teal rings appear from his chest and head towards the Warden.

Think.

Clementine is a Warden, at least partially. What calms her down when she's crying? Tommy didn't think the five S's would help much right now.

Humming.

She loves it when he hums.

Fuck it.

Tommy let his vocal chords vibrate just slightly, a feeling more than a sound. Ender, it hurt, but he persisted.

When the signals hit the Warden, it paused, tilting its head. Then, the Warden's chest pulsed, and Tommy felt the ground beneath him vibrate just slightly. Enough to make the hairs on his arms rise and his skin tingle.

Flashes of teal light danced between them both. Tommy held his note while delicately changing the pitch.

The Warden seemed to be less blood-thirsty now, so Tommy pushed his luck and pulled himself onto his elbows.

Water dripped from the roof of the cave, hitting Tommy's forehead, but he held in his flinch.

The Warden didn't move, still staring at Tommy. Well, if something could stare without eyes.

Tommy got to his feet, one hand on his ribs and the other fishing for ender pearls in his inventory. Thank Ender for the adrenaline rushing through him, Tommy didn't think he could breathe otherwise.

Tommy increased his humming. It was loud enough for him to hear outside his mouth, rather than reverberating through his skull.

Blue light filled the space between the Warden and Tommy. Its chest was brighter than glowstone, illuminating the shadowed cave around them.

The Warden was just a meter away. Tommy took a step forward, humming louder so it covered the sound of his footsteps.

The mob towered over him at this angle, huge and definitely taller than an iron golem. At a distance, all Tommy could see were the jagged ribs and eyeless face, but close up, it looked almost beautiful.

Ferns and stems grew out of its glowing horns, wrapping their way around its head and hanging off like teal curtains. The leaves were delicate, tiny, and they made Tommy's heart ache for the carbon copy on his daughter's head. He could see how they glowed, pulsing light shooting through the veins of the plant along with the water and nutrients that gave it life.

While the Warden's ribs still freaked Tommy out, he couldn't help but be entranced by the glowing souls caught behind them. Clementine's were deeper under her skin and a layer of human ribs, thankfully, but it also meant he couldn't see the unique organs in such detail.

The faces reminded Tommy of the horrifying soul sand found in the Nether, although, unlike he originally thought, they weren't screaming. Rather, they almost looked like they were singing.

Tommy reached a hand out, centimeters away from the Warden's chest. He could see the teal glow on his skin, casting his arm in an otherworldly light.

Gently, Tommy brushed his fingertips on the Warden's skin. It felt soft, almost like moss, but smoother. He could also feel heat emanating from the souls, warming the skin protecting them from above.

Tommy kept his humming up and glanced at the Warden's face. It was hard to understand its body language, considering the thing didn't have eyes, but it was motionless and still had its head cooked to the side.

He almost considered staying, coaxing the Warden into friendliness and discovering its secrets, but he could feel blood dripping onto his shoulder and the adrenaline rush was quickly leaving him.

Tommy got one last glance at the giant mob and its matching environment before tossing the pearl.

He teleported to the narrow exit, rushing through it and flinching at the loud roar that came from behind him.

Tommy slammed a few blocks down behind him, hastily rebuilding the defenses. Something on the other side slammed into them, rattling the walls and causing dust to rain down.

Tommy coughed, which fucking *hurt*, and added an extra layer of obsidian.

The Warden slammed on the barrier again, but it seemed to hold without problem.

He dropped to the ground, semi-controlled, and put his back to the other wall. His netherite chestplate was keeping his ribs mostly compressed, thankfully, but they still fucking hurt and the world was definitely spinning.

Tommy pulled his helmet off his head, carelessly tossing it to the side, and took out a splash instant health potion. He uncorked it and tipped the whole thing out on his head.

Potion trailed down his neck and face, following the blood, but Tommy really couldn't have give less of a shit. There wasn't a hole in his skull anymore, and that was a win in his book.

He took out another potion— regen, this time, no way was he going to try and use instant health on broken ribs without setting them, and poured it all down the gap between his chestplate and neck.

Tommy shivered. It probably wasn't smart to dunk most of his body in assorted potions, but the alternative was death, so he didn't have much of a choice.

Finally, he could take a deep breath and relax. His limbs felt boneless. The cave floor was cold, numbing his legs and chest, and it felt almost as good as a sip of ice water on a hot day.

It felt like he sat there for hours before the stone became too hard and Tommy became too tired. He still needed to get out before the sun came up, and the plants in his pocket needed to be put in soil as soon as possible.

Tommy got to his feet and started the long climb back up.

Chapter End Notes

Well, this chapter took me into an alleyway in London at 9pm GMT and clotheslined me.

Sorry for the delay, I just got a very short notice full time job doing daycare for a fourth month old, and considering I've never had a job this regular in my life, I'm still sort of figuring out the schedule. However, I love babies (sorta obviously from the fic, I think my maternal longing sorta oozes into the words whether i want it to or not) and I'm really frickin happy rn. It means less time to write, and it means that some of this was written with one hand and a phone with a sleeping baby on my lap. Quality may waver. Who knows. But, I know a lot of you have been yelling at me to take care of myself, so I'm doing just that. Don't worry, updates aren't stopping, just probably slowing down. Thanks for all the love and support <3

This chapter was brought to you by my Discover Weekly, which is basically just the Vibrations playlist by Vivi pt 2. I'm not kidding, I've listened to the playlist so much my Spotify just absorbed it. No complaints from me lol.

eyes

Chapter Summary

eye -Index finger touching the cheekbone just under the eye

Tommy, who had finally grown out his beard enough so he didn't look like a balding rat, had Clementine sitting on his hips while swaying to the music. He was smiling, carefree and relaxed.

Clementine was clutching onto Tommy's arm, pudgy hands holding on tight so she could lift her head and listen to the room spin round. She was giggling, the kind of high-pitched laughter that seemed to bubble out of babies.

Sean was... dancing, if you could call it that. After watching him weather crisis after crisis for Tommy, it was refreshing to see him look like an absolute idiot with gangly limbs.

Chapter Notes

whats up, it's ya boy..... skinny penis

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Four months later...

If someone compared Tommy's house from a year ago to now, they'd probably assume the previous owner moved out and an active family moved in, and rightfully so.

From the outside, it looked like a quaint home, nothing special. A slightly overgrown garden, some beaten-up scarecrows in the back, and a well worn path in front. The spruce door did look a little out of place.

From the inside, however, it normally looked like a bomb went off. Empty walls were now covered in assorted crayon drawings, some held up by arrowheads embedded in the walls. Shining netherite armor took over most of the kitchen table, slightly pushed aside to make room for dirty breakfast plates. The high chair looked like a crime scene.

A potted plant sat on the kitchen counter, inconspicuous at first glance, but otherworldly the next. It was an extremely dark green or blue and fern-like, but any sound nearby made it light up a bright cyan. The sprites surrounding it could pass as dust in the air until you stepped into the shadows and saw them glow.

The most obvious difference, however, was shown in the three people currently dancing around the living room.

Tommy, who had finally grown out his beard enough so he didn't look like a balding rat, had Clementine sitting on his hips while swaying to the music. He was smiling, carefree and relaxed.

Clementine was clutching onto Tommy's arm, pudgy hands holding on tight so she could lift her head and listen to the room spin round. She was giggling, the kind of high-pitched laughter that seemed to bubble out of babies.

Sean was... dancing, if you could call it that. After watching him weather crisis after crisis for Tommy, it was refreshing to see him look like an absolute idiot with gangly limbs.

Clementine's chest was lit up like a Christmas tree. Thanks to the sculk sensors around the room, she was tracking Sean's movements with ease, giggling even harder when he would trip or wack Tommy with a rogue arm.

The jukebox in the corner of the room shuffled through songs, random forgettable tunes that Tommy had never heard back in the SMP.

Tommy couldn't stop grinning, even when his cheeks started to hurt from the stretch. Ender, he was so *happy*. His lungs and muscles barely ached anymore, and when Tommy looked in the mirror, his scars looked like a part of his face rather than something separate. Sure, plenty

were from Dream and other unpleasant memories, but there was one on his chin from when he first taught Sean to hold a sword properly and a burn mark where he grabbed a hot kettle to keep it from splashing on Clementine.

If this is what the rest of his life was going to be, then Tommy couldn't wait for the next day.

He wished he could go back to his sixteen year old self and tell him that there was a world where he didn't wake up and hope for something different.

He wished he could go back and do a lot of things, but if Tommy had left on a different day, or brought someone with him, there was a chance he never would have met Sean, or Jill and Isla, or Clementine. And if he had to live through his past in order to get there, to have his family, he would do it a thousand times over.

Eventually, Tommy's arms started to ache from holding a ten month old, and he collapsed in a kitchen chair with Clementine on his lap.

As happy as she looked, Tommy could see her bottom lip started to wobble and break her smile.

"Are you hungry, big girl?" he asked, letting her curl her hand around Tommy's finger.

Clementine babbled something, whatever imitation of speech babies tried when they were too young to actually talk, and stuck Tommy's finger in her mouth.

Tommy laughed. "That's what I thought. Sean, can you grab me a bottle?"

"Sure thing."

Sean turned down the jukebox to a reasonable level and handed Tommy a bottle of formula. Not a second later, Clementine had grabbed it and was trying desperately to shove the nipple

into her mouth.

"Oi, calm down, miss, I got it," Tommy chided, guiding the bottle properly. Clementine latched on, sucking like her life depended on it.

Sean sat down in a chair across from them, absentmindedly rubbing his shoulder.

"She's extra hungry today."

Tommy shrugged. "I think it's the sound. She has to translate everything she's hearing into a visual, and it's probably exhausting."

Sean pet the top of Clementine's head, brushing down her teal hair which had darkened to an almost jet black.

"I'm just glad those plants finally grew. I was ready to go and fight that Warden myself."

"I don't recommend it." Tommy winced. "I had headaches for weeks."

"That might explain why you thought it was a good idea to grow plants from a place called the *deep dark* in sunlight."

"Oh fuck off."

Sean laughed. "It's a good thing carrots are easy."

Tommy flipped him off, but considering his hand was holding up a small child, it wasn't very effective.

Clementine's babbles started up again. She'd practically inhaled her bottle without Tommy noticing.

He set the bottle to the side, drumming his fingers on Clementine's rib cage just above her chest and seeing her smile light up.

"More?" Tommy signed.

It took a moment for Clementine to focus on him, but she responded with the same sign, and Tommy smiled.

He had no idea that babies could even learn sign until Sean mentioned teaching Clementine. The fact that kids could communicate before they could even talk just dumbfounded him. Tommy wondered how many curses he had let slip when he thought she couldn't understand him. Whoops.

"Could you get me the carrots?" Tommy asked.

Sean rolled his eyes but got up. "The only reason I'm helping you is because your daughter is unfairly cute."

"She's practically your daughter too, you know, you can call her that." Tommy said it without thinking, because it was a no-brainer, right? Sean had changed so many dirty diapers during the weird hours between night and morning just so Tommy could sleep for a few. There wasn't any way Sean *couldn't* see himself as Clementine's dad.

But Tommy noticed the silence permeating the air that shouldn't be there.

Sean's back was to Tommy. He was facing the kitchen counter, fiddling with something out of Tommy's sight.

"Sean?"

Clementine was fiddling with Tommy's hair, unaware of the tension that'd just entered the room.

"Clementine is your daughter too," Tommy said.

Sean turned around, head tilted towards the ground. Tommy couldn't see his eyes.

"You... I'm not— I don't want to take that away from you."

"Sean, look at me please."

Sean looked up. His eyes were red.

Tommy switched to his hands. There were just some things that felt better said through sign than sound nowadays.

"I didn't even manage a week without your help. You raised Clementine just as much as I did. She's got a crib in your house, for Prime's sake."

Sean ran a hand through his hair. "But you're her dad."

"Yeah, and you are too, idiot."

"Well, I wasn't sure," Sean paused, "I didn't know if you'd be, uh..."

Tommy raised an eyebrow. *"Comfortable with that? Sean, the healthiest relationship in the SMP is a triad of guys that have been stuck as fiances for way too long. Not to mention that my nephew was born after Wilbur fucked a fish and got pregnant. Nothing is weird anymore."*

"Your brother got a fish pregnant?"

"No, the fish— and her name was Sally, by the way— got him pregnant. Although, I didn't even know about it until he showed up with Fundy, so he may have been bluffing about the whole thing." Tommy shrugged.

Sean looked like someone had slapped him. "How does that even work?"

Tommy grinned, sharp but happy, and very obviously mischievous. "Well, Sean, I'm glad you asked. When a human and a fish love each other very much..."

"Right. Okay. I'm going to pretend like I never heard that to spare myself."

"Wait till your hear about Wilbur's mum, apparently—"

"Nope! Not hearing it!" Sean had stuffed his fingers in his ears, viciously shaking his head.

Tommy cackled.

Sean grabbed the carrots, baked so they were soft, and Tommy started feeding them bite by bite to a very grabby Clementine. They simply watched her eat in silence, soaking up the seconds they knew they'd cherish in a few years.

"I'm not marrying you though," Tommy said, suddenly breaking the calm atmosphere, "because that would anger my many wives, and they would try to murder you in a fit of jealous rage. Just so you know."

Sean laughed. "Yeah, I got it. No murderous wives."

Tommy stole one of Clementine's carrots and popped it in his mouth. "Exactly." Clementine followed his hand with her own and latched onto the short hair of his beard.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, let go, you demon child," Tommy hissed, gently opening Clementine's vice grip and moving her hands away. "Message received, no touching your carrots."

"Maybe it's a sign you should shave."

Tommy pointed an accusatory finger at him. "You're just jealous you can't grow one."

"Uh huh, sure."

Clementine shoved the last carrot piece into her mouth and hummed. Her chest was pulsing lightly, like waves at low tide, gentle but constant. Tommy pressed a kiss right on top of the light.

"Do you wanna try listening some more?"

Clementine babbled some more baby nonsense.

"I'll take that as a yes."

Tommy set her on a soft blanket next to the table. Immediately, she grabbed onto the fabric and tried to stuff it in her mouth.

Tommy rolled his eyes. "You are literally the most spoiled child."

Sean snorted behind him.

"You were horseback riding for hours last night because it was the only thing that would put her to sleep, you don't get to talk," Tommy said.

Sean knelt beside them. "Dad's snarky today, huh Clem. I think he's being clingy."

Tommy hit his arm. "Go play in the dirt."

Leaning in, Sean kissed Clementine on the tip of her nose, and headed out the door. Her giggles followed him out.

Tommy tugged Clementine onto his lap. "He's just jealous that I've gotten to risk my life for you multiple times and he hasn't."

He grabbed a few of the things he'd gathered off the table and down to the blanket. At first glance, it looked like a pile of random shit, but they all involved sound in some way. A wooden flute, a toy that mimicked cricket sounds, a little bell, anything Tommy could find.

Tommy also grabbed the potted plant off the counter top. It was the biggest skulk plant that'd grown, reaching almost a foot high at this point.

After spending hours in an underground garden with the skulk sensors, Tommy was probably the leading expert on the things. He knew they hated sunlight and needed little water, living off cave drain-off and aquifers hidden in deep, spindly cracks in the deepslate. He knew they

couldn't grow close to each other without depriving both of nutrients, and he was pretty sure they grew best when a little rotten flesh was mixed into the bone meal. Unfortunately.

They felt like a weird combination of fern and moss, thin and able to wave in the breeze, but almost fuzzy and dense at the same time. It also tickled slightly when they lit up.

Tommy let Clementine lean forward and explore the new thing in front of her with her hands. He was ready to pull back if she grabbed too hard, but Clementine simply ran her hands along the top of the fern with wide eyes.

The plant lit up like there were sparks trapped underneath its skin, appearing everywhere Clementine touched like raindrops in a lake. Tommy watched in awe as the lights in Clementine's chest synced with those in the skulk. He was watching a symphony unfold in front of his eyes.

Clementine's eyes were almost closed, drooping as she lost herself in whatever feeling she was experiencing. Not for the first time, Tommy envied her knowledge of a side of the world he'd never be able to discover.

Eventually, the glowing subsided to a normal level and Clementine pulled her hand away. Her eyes were back open, but her cheeks were so scrunched up in a grin you could barely see them anyway. Tommy shoved down the impulse to squeeze them.

He picked up one of the items around them, a wooden sculpture of a cricket made to mimic their sounds.

Clementine reached for the cricket toy the second Tommy started clicking it. He'd brought it home after finding it tucked away in a wandering trader's stand, and she'd fallen in love.

Instead of handing her it, Tommy lifted it above her head, continuing to click it.

Clementine tracked it perfectly, hands not faltering in their mission to grab the toy and most likely shove it in her mouth.

The skulk sensor next to them fluttered lightly in the still air and gave off a slight glow. Tommy could barely spot the bright teal particles drifting around them like dust particles in a sunbeam.

Tommy put the toy away even as Clementine whined, knowing she wouldn't focus on anything else the moment it was hers. He picked up the flute and blew across the top like he'd seen others do. Unfortunately, the sound that came out was less than pleasant. In fact, it sounded a lot like the dying screech of a bunny.

Clementine's face scrunched up in pain, and the skulk plant went wild.

Tommy set the flute down. "Alright, maybe not that one."

He grabbed the bell instead and rang it once. Clementine's head turned towards the noise. Her eyes were still unfocused, just like always, but her ears were twitching and locked onto the bell.

Tommy rang it again, and slowly moved it across her vision as the sound faded out. She followed it to a tee.

He touched the side of the metal to silence it and held it above his head. Again, Clementine knew exactly where it was.

Tommy was perfectly still, no sound at all, yet the skulk sensor was still lit up and waving.

Slowly, Tommy lowered his head and placed his ear on Clementine's chest. She giggled, but at the same time Tommy could hear a low note vibrating through her body. It was barely audible, but it made the hairs on Tommy's arms raise.

"Are you using echolocation?"

Clementine giggled.

"Holy shit. My baby is a superhero."

Tommy stood up and paced around the room, letting Clementine 'watch'. She followed his movement perfectly, and if it wasn't for her unfocused eyes, Tommy would think she could see.

He cracked a grin. "Oh, Sean is gonna be so mad he missed this."

Chapter End Notes

It honestly has not felt like two weeks since I last updated, I'm so sorry lol. But, I don't feel /too/ bad cause I had a great week and really enjoyed myself, and I know you all want me to take care of myself <3 so thank you all for sticking around

A majority of this was written in a field on my phone cause I was camping, so excuse any mistakes. I'll go back and edit this whole thing eventually.

If any of you remember, I mentioned that chpt 16 was written a while before it was published, and I had another chapter in the same boat. That chapter is soon. Be prepared. :)

sleep

Chapter Summary

sleep - Hands start open and vertical, palms facing inwards, the fingers move downwards to meet the thumbs in a closing motion. Should occur in front of the eyes.

“You’re stressed—”

Tommy cut him off. “Yeah, no fucking shit I’m stressed, Sean. Amazing observational skills.”

“—stressed about something, and you aren’t telling me.”

“What do you want to know, big man?”

Sean lifted an eyebrow. “Let’s start with why you’re building a doomsday shack in the middle of the forest.”

Chapter Notes

i lived, bitch

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

6 months later...

Tommy lined up the nail in his hand with a gentle tap of his hammer, then raised his arm.

Wham!

The metal disappeared into the wood. Tommy pulled out another nail.

Wham!

His whole body was finely shaking. His hands were still.

Wham!

“Tommy.”

He ignored Sean standing in his peripheral vision, holding Clementine on his hip. Tommy fished another nail out of his bag.

“Tommy, please.”

Tommy lifted the hammer.

“Tommy!”

Frustrated, Tommy huffed and tossed the hammer onto the ground. He whirled to face Sean.

“Do you need something, Sean?”

Sean readjusted his grip on Clementine who seemed to be attempting to wriggle her way out of his arms to get to Tommy.

“Daddy!” she squealed.

“You’re stressed—”

Tommy cut him off. *“Yeah, no fucking shit I’m stressed, Sean. Amazing observational skills.”*

“—stressed about something, and you aren’t telling me.”

“What do you want to know, big man?”

Sean lifted an eyebrow. “Let’s start with why you’re building a doomsday shack in the middle of the forest.”

Well, he wasn’t far off from the truth. Tommy had spent most of the night and early morning setting up a building reminiscent of his first house in the spruce forest, but this one was much closer to the house. He’d already set up dirt and grass around it so it blended in, and he was finishing up the door. It was still exposed, and Tommy was debating hiding the whole thing in a piston door.

The inside was empty for now. Tommy was planning to fill it with redstone mechanics, note blocks, extra toys for Clementine, and anything she would need to survive for a short amount of time.

It wasn’t doomsday, per say, but a temporary safe house. Somewhere to hide when it all blew over.

“I’m just making a play area for Clementine.” Tommy didn’t know why he was lying. It wasn’t like Sean would just leave him alone. He wished he could stop.

“Right...” Sean said, “does this have anything to do with the travelers that came through yesterday?”

Ender damn Sean and his uncanny ability to read Tommy’s mind. Couldn’t he just have one day of peace to mope about and act like an angsty teenager?

News about the SMP trickled into the town every once in a while, always by word of mouth from the people passing through.

Tommy had heard about his own exile as if it was breaking news-- a year after it actually happened. And the details were all mixed up and exaggerated to the point where it was a completely different story. So, when wandering traders or visitors came through town, Tommy tried to avoid them and tune out the gossip that would float around for days.

The other day hadn't been any different, or, well, it *shouldn't* have been any different.

A group of three passed through the town square at noon looking for a hot meal and a place to sleep for the night. Someone took them by the arm and started to lead them to the inn, so Tommy turned around to head back home, but not before he caught a sliver of their conversation.

"--believe what I heard about Dream."

Tommy paused.

"Yeah, the guy that owns the SMP. Apparently, he vanished. Like, straight up disappeared. Some people think he's dead, but I heard they were building this prison..."

Tommy's world narrowed to a few very important facts.

One. Dream wasn't in the SMP anymore.

Two. No one knew where Dream was.

Three. Dream had never found Tommy.

Four. This all probably happened months ago.

Five. He had a daughter to protect.

He dashed down village roads, making his way to his home on the outskirts of town. Pushing the door open with a slam, Tommy skidded into Clementine's bedroom.

Sean was there, snoring in the rocking chair with a similarly unconscious Clementine curled into his chest.

Tommy breathed out.

Okay. Everything was okay.

He lowered himself to the ground slowly, as not to wake Sean and Clementine, and sat with his legs crossed. He... he just needed a moment.

Tommy forced himself to relax, clenching his muscles and then releasing. He hadn't had a panic attack in... months? Was it a year now? It didn't matter, because he wasn't going to break that streak.

He focused on Clementine, watching her chest rise and fall with her breathing. She was curled in on herself while tucked into Sean's arms as much as possible.

She had grown so fast in the past six months, so fast, in fact, Tommy was almost certain it was a side effect of her hybrid genetics.

According to Sean, most sixteen month olds weren't supposed to be talking in short phrases already, much less the occasional sentence. It didn't help that she went from walking to

running in just a month or two. Tommy was still mourning the days when he could just pick Clementine up and she'd be happy. Now, life was all about finding all the sharp things Dad had hid in the house and trying to fit them in her mouth.

He tried not to think about what that meant for her lifespan. One crisis at a time.

Thankfully, the sculk plants tucked into every nook and cranny in the house seemed to keep her happy and healthy, and she was thriving more than ever.

Once he was certain Clementine was safe, Tommy headed into the forest where he now stood almost twelve hours later.

Sean set down a very wiggly Clementine, who immediately dug her hands into the moss covering the ground and started ripping it up. Tommy tried not to sigh at the thought of another bath tonight.

"I know they were talking about the SMP, and you're normally fine about that, but this time they mentioned Dream, and I figured..."

Sean trailed off.

Tommy was practically *vibrating*. He was clenching every single one of his muscles, either trying to stop a panic attack or get it over quicker, he wasn't actually sure.

"He's going to kill you all," Tommy croaked.

That was the only clear thought in Tommy's head. Dream was coming back, or he never left, and he was coming to kill Tommy. And after Tommy was dead, he would kill Sean and Clementine, or maybe he'd kill them first and make Tommy watch like he did with Mexican Dream, oh Ender, he wasn't going to kill Tommy, he was going to chain him like a dog and trap him underground and stab and starve and hurt and hurt and hurt and—

Tommy let his knees hit the ground and reached out his hands, grabbing at open air. Ender, please, he needed *something*.

Hands found his own, and he squeezed. Sean was kneeling in front of him, silent but steady, and Tommy let his eyes close. He focused on the skin touching his own, the ridges of fingerprints that swirled like paint in water, smooth and ridged at the same time. There was nothing else in the world, just palms resting on each other, radiating body heat.

Tommy wrestled his breathing into something Sean would consider passable and synched the tensing of his muscles with it. Clench and release, clench and release, clench and release, until the release actually felt relaxed, and he could open his eyes.

Sean had shifted to sit on the ground with Tommy's hands in his lap. Clementine was just behind him, the remnants of moss left forgotten in her own hands as she tilted her head towards Tommy.

"Daddy's heart fast," she said, words much too clear for a normal toddler her age.

Tommy pushed a breath out of his mouth, noting how Clementine's chest lit up when it turned into a whistle.

"Yeah, Clem, it is. I'll be okay though."

Clementine abandoned her moss and stumbled her way over to Sean and Tommy, plopping herself down in Tommy's lap. She spread her chubby toddler fingers across Tommy's chest—the left side, specifically.

Tommy braced himself for... something. Sean seemed just as nervous.

After a few seconds, Clementine leaned back and smiled.

“Better!”

Tommy was about to smile and give Clementine a thank you, just to let her think she helped, when he realized he’d stopped shaking.

Slowly, Tommy raised two fingers to his neck and waited.

“Are you alright?” Sean whispered.

Tommy nodded. “I’m fine. Great actually, my heart rate is back to normal. It’s like the panic just drained out of me.”

They both turned to Clementine, who, predictably, had already returned to her moss.

“Hey Clem,” Sean started, “what did you do to Daddy’s heart?”

She giggled, ripping through another patch of green. “My heart sing,” she said, tapping the area on her chest that housed her sensory organs, not her heart, and then proceeded to mumble a whole sentence that was unintelligible.

Tommy’s eyes widened. “I take it back, she’s not a superhero, she’s a cryptic Greek prophet or some shi— crap.”

“I’m guessing you understood none of that either.”

“Just the part about her heart singing, yeah.”

Sean took the moss out of Clementine's hands. "Your heart sings?"

She nodded.

"What does it sound like?"

Clementine hummed, just a simple note held, the same thing Tommy would do to calm her down.

She dug her hands into the ground again, but instead of ripping up more moss, she stilled for a second.

The light breeze in the air seemed to pause. Instinctively, Tommy held his breath. For just a moment, every plant in the vicinity swayed in sync, each blade of grass and leaf on a branch moving together in a way eerily similar to the skulk plants in the deep dark.

"Everything sing!" Clementine exclaimed, clapping her hands. Her chest was pulsing to the same rhythm they'd just seen reflected in the world around them.

Well. That was a development.

"I take it back," Tommy said, "she's a Disney princess."

Sean's face was white. "You're joking. You're joking around when your daughter could have stopped your heart a minute ago."

"Our daughter. You get half of the responsibility if I die."

Sean buried his head in his hands. “One of you was enough to kill me from stress. I did *not* need another.”

“Have you considered you might be a magnet for crazy people?”

“You were the one that found and took her!”

Tommy grinned. “You’re the main character. Stop being a pussy and accept your fate as an anime protagonist.”

Clementine clapped her hands together again, and the trees shook with it. “Pussy!”

Sean turned to face Tommy, slowly and carefully like he was restraining himself. There was murder in his eyes.

“Run.”

Tommy tucked Clementine into her crib, letting the note he was humming trail off as he tiptoed out of the room. It was a bit early for a nap, but she tired herself out after bending all the organic life to her will, so Tommy figured she deserved it. You know, normal toddler things.

Sean was sitting at the kitchen table, exhausted and covered in dirt after Tommy tackled him multiple times. He also had a multitude of pine needles stuck in his hair, and Tommy was keeping track of how long it took him to notice.

“Is she asleep?”

Tommy nodded.

“Oh thank Ender,” Sean groaned, “I think I need a nap too.”

Tommy collapsed in a chair, resting his feet on the table until Sean immediately swatted them off.

“I feel like I could run a marathon.”

Sean fixed him with a glare. “I know you were up all night. You’re running on pure adrenaline, and when you crash, you’re going to get all whiny, and I’ll have to practically carry you to bed.”

Tommy pouted.

“That only works for the actual baby.”

He put his head on the table. “Whatever.”

“I know you’re avoiding the topic.”

Tommy flipped him off. “Fuck off, I was getting there.”

Sean laughed, practically a snort. “Sorry, would you like me to pretend to be an idiot so you can bring it up?”

“That would be appreciated, thank you.”

“Mhm.”

Tommy didn't respond just yet. He needed to sort out whatever was going on in his head first. Just a few moments to get everything screwed on straight.

Clementine was in the other room, safe, and even if Tommy couldn't hear her breathing, it didn't mean it wasn't there. He didn't need to check.

Sean was next to him. He wasn't mad, just like always. Tommy was surprised that... well, that he wasn't surprised. Sean was a constant, and Tommy had placed full trust in him without thinking, and it hadn't backfired. He was still here.

Dream wasn't here.

He was okay.

Tommy stood and opened one of his chests, the one tucked in the corner that he rarely touched. About eight months ago, he carved a box out of some redwood he bought off a wandering trader. The top was decorated with a handmade engraving of Lmanburg's skyline — but the way he wanted to remember it. Trees reaching to the sky, blackstone walls, safety.

Inside, he tucked everything he still had of his time in the SMP. It wasn't much— his compass, neck scarf, the red and white shirt he was wearing when he left. Some days he wished he had kept some blue on him to take.

Tommy took the compass out and put the rest away.

“I told you about exile, right?”

Sean frowned. “Not much. Only that Tubbo exiled you under Dream’s orders, right? And you said Dream... wasn’t nice.”

Tommy winced. “That may have been an understatement from past me.”

“I told you that when you said it. I guess it’s better late than never, though.”

“Well, uh,” Tommy said, “he sort of... tortured me? And gaslit me until I thought he was my only friend and everyone hated me— although that may have been true. Still not sure. But, yeah. I was cut off from everyone, and Dream made me reliant on him, and it just went downhill from there. It was... bad. And a hard mindset to break.”

“I’m not sure what Dream’s end goal was, whether it was just having fun using me or if he was molding me into a weapon. He didn’t want me to die, I know that, I was considering, well... I was considering jumping into a lava lake in the Nether and he stopped me.”

“Anyways, I hid some items from him and he blew up everything, so I towered up and almost jumped again. But I dove into a pond and just left. And that’s how I ended up here.”

Sean’s eyes were fixed on Tommy’s shoulder, the one where they both knew a knot of scar tissue sat under the skin.

“When you—” Sean’s voice wavered, “when you said Dream gave you your scars, I thought you just meant the two from your deaths, not... all of them.”

Tommy shrugged. “There’s a few from Sapnap and Wilbur, maybe Techno, but most of them — the ones I remember— are Dream’s.”

“They’re not Dream’s,” Sean snapped.

“What?”

“It’s your body, your scars. Dream doesn’t own you or some crap like that.”

“Woah, woah,” Tommy held up his hands, “it was just a slip of the tongue. I’m alright, Sean. I’m okay now.”

Sean rocketed out of his seat. “I’m so—” he stuttered, anger lacing his words and slipping past his tongue, “He shouldn’t have been able to do that!”

Tommy put his hands on Sean’s shoulders, gripping slightly. “I know. It was years ago. I got better.”

“That’s not th—”

“I’m okay.”

Sean shoved his hands off.

“But it still happened!” Sean roared, and Prime, this was the angriest Tommy had ever seen him. “It still happened, and you just bottled it all up, and now you’re acting like it’s normal to be okay with this, and I’m tired of hearing about all this stuff that happened to you because you’re the best person I’ve ever met— you’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me, and I can’t! do! *anything* to fix this!”

Sean’s chest was heaving, and there were angry tears sitting on his cheeks, and Tommy could hear Clementine start to cry in the other room. But he was frozen, processing the words that seemed to burst from Sean with his lungs as punctuation.

“I’m sorry,” Sean whispered, his energy all gone, “I shouldn’t have yelled, you didn’t need that.”

Tommy pulled him in for a gentle hug. “I think *you* did though.”

“But this isn’t about me, I’m supposed to be helping you wi—”

“Shush.” Tommy flicked him on the shoulder. “You aren’t *supposed* to be doing anything. My problems aren’t your responsibility. I appreciate your help and support, but you’ve gotta take care of yourself too, okay? I know you exhausted yourself looking for me this morning.”

Sean sighed, his breath hitching slightly as he let his remaining tears fall. “It’s just unfair.”

“I know. We can’t fix everything, alright?”

“Alright.”

Tommy dropped the hug and steered Sean by his shoulders towards Clementine’s room. “We can fix the crying child, though.”

Sean snorted weakly, wiping his nose with his sleeve.

“Gross.” Tommy wrinkled his nose.

“You ate sand last week.”

“Nutrients, Sean. Nutrients.”

Clementine was standing up in her crib, wailing and shaking the bars. The moment they walked in, she stopped.

“Well that was easier than expected.”

Sean picked her up, and Clementine closed her eyes and snuggled up close. “I don’t think she liked me yelling.”

Tommy grabbed Sean’s shoulders again and pushed him out of the room.

“Where are we going?” Sean asked.

“To a bed. Which one? I don’t care. I am tired, you are tired, Clem is tired. We are taking a nap.”

Sean just let Tommy manhandle him onto a mattress and under the covers. Clem wiggled around until her nose was barely peeking above the sheets, and her arms and legs were shoved as close as possible to Sean’s warm torso. Tommy climbed in after them.

Sean shivered when Tommy accidentally brushed his calf. “Your feet are absolutely freezing.”

“Shut the fuck up and go to sleep.”

Surprisingly, Sean listened.

Tommy’s mind took a while to calm down, just like always. His thoughts drifted towards the unfinished shack in the woods, and the looming threat of Dream, but Tommy stuck his finger in Clementine’s curled fist until she grabbed on, and all of that just seemed a little bit smaller.

He didn’t dream.

Chapter End Notes

THANK YOU FOR 2500 KUDOS AND 1000 SUBS!!!! (plus over 50 user subs??? guys calm down i have one fic /lh)

So not to be one of those fanfic writers that's like, "sorry I didn't update, my whole family got killed by the russian mafia and I'm currently recovering from multiple gunshot wounds so updates may be a day late, I'm so, so, sorry," but I randomly had to go to the ER this past weekend lol. So there would have been a chapter then but I was too busy having tachycardia lmao. It was probably just cause I was sick but we're monitoring it so I should be fine. Just another one to add to the list of unexplained and annoying but technically not life threatening medical issues i have :)

Yall have been super chill with my loose schedule, so thanks for that, the love has been amazing <3 if you follow my twitter, you may have seen that post i retweeted that was like, "I love it when people write essays in my comments! go wild!" and I wanted to restate that here. I do not care about the quality, length, content, whatever of your comment. (Size doesnt matter lol) You wanna write an essay? go for it. You wanna drop a simple heart? amazing, i love it. You wanna write all of your plot guesses and hyper analyze everything i write? knock yourself out. Do you wanna rant about your day or just chat with me, entirely unrelated to the fic? Bet, I respond to every comment. My twitter dm's are also open :) go frickin crazy, people, i had a comment thread with a reader who wanted to bang the Warden. Im 18+, so nsfw jokes are chill. Do whatever you want <3

The chapter was written mostly to songs from my discover weekly, it slapped this week. Check out The Red Means I Love You by Madds Buckley. Great frickin song.

So, I'm sure most of you can see where this fic is starting to head. We're getting close to the end, I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. I think we have about 7 chapters left, but a lot of them will happen concurrently, so strap yourselves in. :)

knife

Chapter Summary

knife - point the index and middle fingers on both hands, placed on top of each other in an “X” shape, and move the top hand in a sawing motion

Tommy urged his horse forward through the streets of the city, Clementine tucked safely into his lap. Her hands were gripping the straps of his papoose, ears twitching and mouth dropped in an 'O' as they took in the city. Tommy grinned. No matter how many times they visited, it was like Clementine had never seen the city before.

Chapter Notes

hey yall, its been a bit! glad to be back :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

3 months later...

Tommy urged his horse forward through the streets of the city, Clementine tucked safely into his lap. Her hands were gripping the straps of his papoose, ears twitching and mouth dropped in an 'O' as they took in the city. Tommy grinned. No matter how many times they visited, it was like Clementine had never seen the city before.

They had just left the bustling town square which was currently filled with temporary shacks and merchants selling an assortment of handmade goods. Plenty of parents were buying last minute Christmas gifts, so the street was swarmed with people.

Tommy had never celebrated a Christmas without snow— excluding the one he missed while escaping from exile, so it was still weird to see pine trees decorated with tinsel but no powder underneath, even after a few years.

A loud slurping noise came from below him, and Tommy looked down to see Clementine shoving her necklace as far into her mouth as possible.

After their second trip into the city, Clementine fell sick again. She recovered quickly, thanks to the hundreds of potted skulk plants Sean and Tommy surrounded her with, but he vowed to never hurt her like that again. Of course, he didn't want to keep her trapped in the house with occasional visits to the little shed in the woods, so they looked for a solution.

In late fall, the skulk plants dropped the little bulbs that grew on the ferns. They were slightly larger than a grape, bright teal, and one of Clementine's favorite snacks. That had been an interesting fact to discover.

They also helped conduct vibrations just like their plants, and Sean even thought they did a better job based on Clementine's affinity for them. Unfortunately, they barely lasted a few days off the vine.

Tommy knew it was possible to enchant food, but he'd only seen it applied to golden apples. Techno had mentioned once— while Tommy was elbow-deep in his food chest— that most of them just couldn't handle the inscription process. It didn't help that most of the information about enchanting had been lost to history, the two main sources left being stronghold bookcases and Philza Minecraft.

So, he couldn't enchant the bulbs, unless he thought he could do what generations of clerics never did. Tommy did not think that highly of his skills.

Instead, he did what he knew. Clementine didn't need to eat the bulbs, just keep them nearby, so the enchantment didn't need to be applied to the food directly, just nearby enough to affect it. Tommy dug his woodcarving supplies out from the pile of stuff at the bottom of the closet and got to work.

The product of his labor was a necklace with an enchanted wooden pendant shaped like a cage. It had a hinge to take bulbs in and out, and then Tommy could latch it so Clementine wouldn't just eat them. Once the bulb eventually rotted (about a month with Protection IV applied), they would replace it with one from their freezer.

With this nifty little thing, Clementine could go wherever she wanted for as long as she wanted. Tommy tried not to think about her, all grown up and adventurous, heading through the mismatched spruce door and never coming back. He thought of Wilbur and Phil. He then purposely did *not* think of Wilbur and Phil.

All this to say, this wasn't Clementine's third trip to the city. She *loved* hearing the chaos and made Tommy promise to bring her every time he visited Misuko or the alley kids.

"Clem," Tommy chided, pulling the necklace out of her mouth, "you're going to wear through the enchantment."

"I want a snack."

Tommy wordlessly handed her a few carrots from his bag, focusing on the road.

Clementine pouted. "I don't want carrots."

"You had some yesterday."

"No! I don't want them."

Tommy held back a sigh. People were not lying when they talked about the terrible twos. Clementine was almost four months from two, but she was quite obviously growing faster than a full human child. It was more pronounced when she was a baby, but if Tommy had to guess, she was probably equal to two and a half years old.

It wasn't as fast as Fundy, for example, but it still made Tommy's heart skip a beat when he thought about it.

"You can have a snack when we say hi to our friends, okay?"

Clementine perked up, letting her necklace fall through her fingers. “Will Callum be there?”

Tommy actually sighed this time, running his free hand through her dark curls to distract himself. “Yes, sweetheart. Callum is there every time.”

“I wanna play with his sword.” Much to Tommy’s horror, Clementine had adopted Sean’s American accent and inflections, mashing words together much like Technoblade did.

Tommy shook his head. “It’s a dagger, and no, you can’t play with it.”

Clementine rocked in her papoose, wiggling and purposely making Tommy’s life a living hell. “Whyyyyyyyy?” she whined.

Tommy was saved from responding by a shout in front of them as they turned a corner. Callum and his friend, who he’d learned was named Hattie, were waving to them. A group of kids, dirty and stick thin, stood behind them.

“Tommy!”

He hopped off the horse, bringing the large bag he’d packed and Clementine with him. The second his feet touched the ground, Tommy unwrapped Clementine from his chest and set her on the ground. She ran to Hattie and giggled as the girl picked her up and swung her in the air.

“Ender, she acts like I never pay attention to her,” Tommy groaned.

Callum laughed, clapping Tommy on the shoulder. It seemed like every time he visited, Callum shot up another inch. Tommy had no idea how old he actually was, considering Callum gave him a wildly varying answer every time he asked, but they almost looked the

same age now— other than Tommy's beard, which Callum teased him endlessly about. He thought it was supposed to be the other way around, but somehow the kid made it work.

"You're spoiling her. She's gonna throw a fit when you send her off to school, unless you homeschool her," Callum said.

Tommy's heart skipped a beat. "Stop rushing me."

"Time waits for no one, old man," Callum laughed, "she's gonna be grown up before you know it."

Tommy readjusted his grip on the bag, slinging it over his shoulder. "Why do you have to be reasonable and mature? When I was your age I was making dick jokes every other sentence."

"You still do that."

"Fuck off."

They approached the fire pit most of the kids surrounded, huddled for warmth, but Tommy noticed most of them had blankets around their shoulders and wool socks on their feet. He dropped the bag on the ground and started untying it.

"Alright everyone," Tommy called, "there's some extra stuff this time. Clementine insisted on getting you Christmas gifts."

Everyone laughed, including Clementine herself. Tommy liked to keep up his gruff persona and pretend he only brought supplies for them because of Clementine, but they all knew he really had a soft spot for the group of street kids. At this point, it was just routine to make an excuse.

The kids dove forward, pulling items out of the bag and sorting them into piles. For children that grew up with so few worldly possessions, they were incredible at sharing. Somewhere along the line, they realized surviving was more worth it with someone by your side. Tommy had to agree.

Toys were passed around, exchanging hands until everyone got something, and then food, blankets, tools, anything they requested were added to the growing stockpile. Tommy looked at every single kid, even the ones he hadn't met, and did a visual check up. Most looked happier and healthier than he'd ever seen.

Clementine was sitting with three kids just a few years older than her, making their hair wave to the beat of her fingertips. They were all giggling, and Hattie was looking from a few meters away, so Tommy relaxed and let his attention go somewhere else.

Callum was moving through the alleyway, checking on a few kids, ones whose cheekbones were more pronounced or marked with bruises. Ender, was Tommy that young when he patched up the Lmanburgians after battle?

Eventually, Callum came to stand beside him and look over the crowd.

"You've done a lot of good here," he murmured.

Tommy would have to agree, even if he didn't want to admit it.

"Have you heard the rumors about the SMP?" he said, changing the subject.

Callum wrinkled his nose. "All the stuff about that Dream guy? Sure, everyone has."

"Like what?"

“He’s disappeared, he’s died, he’s stuck in prison, a bunch of stuff. From what I can tell, no one actually knows where he is, dead or alive, and a lot of people are starting to look.”

Tommy frowned. “Why?”

Callum shrugged. “Dunno. My guess? They’re hoping to catch him while he’s weak. Dream is powerful— or was, and that can be useful. If it were me, I would get near that shitshow with a ten meter pole.”

“I... I think some bad stuff is coming our way— my way. If I don’t come back, you’re gonna take care of them all, right?”

Callum stopped scanning the kids to look at Tommy. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Tommy fidgeted. How was he supposed to tell a kid— and Tommy distantly realized Callum was the same age as he was during the first war— supposed to tell a kid that he had a violent murderer coming after him?

“Dream and I go back a couple years. To put it simply, he doesn’t like me. There’s a chance — well, there’s a chance he’s going to kill me.”

“I’ve seen you fight, there’s no way anyone could beat you.”

Tommy appreciated the blind loyalty that Callum had in him, but it worried him. He’d looked at Wilbur like that, once.

Tommy put a hand on Callum’s shoulder. “No one’s invincible, big man, even me. And I did some bad stuff a couple years ago, and it’s coming back to bite me in the ass.” Tommy smiled, but he could tell it was sad, tinged with memories resurfacing.

Callum frowned. “But you’ve always helped us. And you’ve got a daughter. If you aren’t doing anything bad anymore, why can’t Dream just leave you be?”

“It doesn’t work like that, unfortunately. Dream isn’t the kind of guy to let things go.”

Callum fiddled with the small knife on his belt that Tommy gifted him for his birthday just a few months ago. “I would fight for you. We all would.”

Tommy’s blood ran cold.

“No,” he snapped.

Callum looked at him, slightly shocked.

“Sorry,” Tommy said, “I just— I’m not letting kids fight. You aren’t going anywhere near Dream, weapons or not, okay?”

“But—”

“*No*, Callum. If any of you get involved in this, I’ll give myself up to Dream. Do you understand me?”

“Fine.”

Tommy sighed. “I know how you feel, Callum. Living on the streets at your age, it forces you to grow up too quickly, but that doesn’t mean you need to act like an adult all the time. I know you’re responsible, and I know you can handle yourself— that’s why I’m trusting you to look after the other kids. But this is something out of your depth, okay, and I need you to trust me to do it without you.”

Callum crossed his arms and huffed. “I don’t like it.”

“I know.”

“You better stay alive or I’ll beat your ass.”

Tommy’s heart ached. “I can’t promise that.”

Clementine’s giggles rang out through the alleyway. One of the older kids was spinning her around, making them both dizzy until they fell down. Clementine’s ears were twitching like crazy, and the pebbles on the ground were vibrating wildly, not synced like normal.

“Okay, I trust you,” Callum said.

And that was all Tommy could ask for.

-

Tommy walked into the back of Vacluse’s Viper, Clementine on his hip. Misuko was waiting for him.

“You said you’d be here hours ago,” she grumbled.

Tommy laughed. “At the most, I’m a half hour late. You just missed me.”

Misuko grabbed a glass and started polishing it. “You’re awfully cocky today. I miss when I could just close your book when you insulted me.”

Tommy didn't even set Clementine down, he just handed her directly to Misuko, because he knew that's where she would end up anyway.

"Suko! I have a trick!" Clementine said.

Misuko grinned and brushed away Clementine's flyaway hairs with her hand. "Oh yeah, you wanna show me?"

Clementine held her breath, comically puffing out her cheeks and turning her face a purple blush instantly. A moment passed, and then all the bottles in the room started whistling like someone was blowing air over the opening. The notes fluctuated, then all came together at the same pitch before breaking apart seconds later.

"That was amazing!" Misuko cheered, elbowing Tommy until he started clapping.

"She practically burst my eardrums last night," he grumbled.

Misuko kept smiling. "That sounds like a personal problem."

Tommy bit his lip to keep back a curse, considering Clementine was listening to their conversation with a very curious look on her face.

"Are you tired, Clem?" he asked, knowing the answer would be no, but she would fall asleep in minutes anyway.

"No."

Well, he hadn't expected anything else.

Misuko and Tommy shared a look, and she adjusted her grip on Clementine so that her little face could press into Misuko's chest.

They sat down at the table, and Misuko slid him a plate piled high with food.

"Thanks," Tommy said, already shoving food onto his fork. "Clementine ate after we visited the kids, so she should be fine until after her nap."

"You've been visiting them more recently, what's up with that?"

Tommy shrugged, trying to stay relaxed and act casual. "Just... a bit worried."

Misuko raised an eyebrow. "About?"

"Do you remember our conversation when we first met?"

Misuko shook her head. Briefly, Tommy noticed that Clementine's eyes were already closed.

"I was a little busy trying to keep you from having a mental breakdown and stabbing some more people."

"Piss off."

Misuko snorted. "You were saying?"

"Well," Tommy started, "you mentioned your ex-husband, right? And I talked about a guy who had... done something similar. Well, uh, my guy is Dream, the owner of the SMP."

There was a very pregnant pause.

Tommy was never good at reading people's facial expressions, choosing instead to listen to the inflections in their voice, and Misuko's face was blank and she wasn't talking.

He awkwardly coughed, and just barreled through the rest of what he needed to say.

"Dream is on the move, I think. So I'm just, uh, making sure everyone will be okay without me, if something happens."

Wordlessly, Misuko stood up and walked up the rickety staircase tucked in the corner of the room that Tommy knew led to her bathroom. She still had Clementine tucked against her, sleeping, and Tommy was left stunned. Was he just supposed to sit there? Did Misuko just kidnap Clementine?

Thankfully, Misuko returned just a second later, a thin box in one of her hands. She set it in front of Tommy and gestured for him to open it.

Tommy slid the top off and peeked inside. A simple iron knife sat inside, standard hilt and blade, but it looked clean and well-kept. Tommy had never seen Misuko use it before. Gingerly, Tommy picked it up.

"That's the knife my ex killed me with," Misuko said.

Tommy dropped the knife like it was on fire.

"What the fuck?"

Misuko's voice was deadpan. "That was one of our kitchen knives. I tried to leave one night, and he stabbed me. He was gone by the time I respawned."

Tommy could barely speak. "You're telling me this... why?"

"I've been keeping it ever since," she said, like that explained everything, "I promised myself if I saw him again, I'd fight back. It took me a year to stop carrying that knife with me everywhere I went."

"I thought you said you weren't sure if you would kill him," Tommy said.

Misuko shrugged. "I'm not. But better to be prepared if I do, right?" She picked up the knife and pressed it into Tommy's hands. "And I think you might need this sooner than me."

The thought of killing Dream... Tommy knew that Dream wasn't actually his friend in exile. It had taken him years to deconstruct the manipulation and lies that Dream planted in his head, but he had. There were no remnants of the boy who craved his abuser's touch.

But... still. Dream and Tommy had been actual friends once. And Tommy didn't know if he had it in him to take a canon life. His thirst for victory and blatant disregard for consequences had left years ago, and all that was left was the guilt of his actions. Tommy didn't want to be that person again.

If Dream threatened his family, though— well, Tommy knew he would kill for Clementine or Sean. That wasn't a question. He just hoped it wouldn't come down to that.

Tommy curled his fingers around the knife. "Do you think I should kill him?" *If I even can.*

"That's your decision to make. I will say, however, I remember what you were like when we first met, and I know it takes a lot to damage a person like that. Personally, I think the bitch deserves to rot in hell." Misuko grinned, full of teeth and venom. "If you do use that knife, I

suggest you use it repeatedly, many times, in varying painful locations, and you tell him the first one is from me.”

Tommy put the knife back in the box and replaced the lid. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Misuko handed him a sleeping Clementine and slipped the box into Tommy’s bag for him. “You better head out, it’s getting late, and you wouldn’t want to keep Helicopter Mom waiting for you.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Would it kill you to use his actual name for once?”

“Yes.”

Misuko shoved a wrapped up bowl of something and a few bottles into his hands, motioning for him to put them in his inventory.

“Some extra soup,” she said, “and some fresh juice for Clementine.”

Tommy readjusted his grip on his daughter. “If every adult figure in her life keeps spoiling her, she’s going to be the worst child.”

Misuko kissed Clementine on the head. “Better that than what we had, right?”

“Right.” The thought stung. Clementine wouldn’t have a childhood like his, not now, not ever. Tommy would make sure of it.

“Now get going before I kick you out of my bar.”

Tommy moaned and groaned on his wait out, and Misuko put her full energy into pushing him out the door, but they both knew how much the other appreciated the company. Sean was amazing, the best person Tommy could ask for, but sometimes he needed someone that understood a sliver of what he went through, and he figured Misuko felt the same way.

Clementine stirred as Tommy got on his horse and started down the street. The sun was setting, a beautiful mix of orange and purple, and for a second, Tommy wished she could see it. But then Clementine's eyes lit up at the sound of a blacksmith's hammer ringing, and he realized that she probably saw a side of the world that he'd sell his soul to take a peak at.

Tommy checked to make sure her necklace was still around her neck and kissed the crown of her head. He knew that no matter what happened, she would be safe. She would, because if Tommy couldn't promise himself that, he didn't know what he would do.

With the extra weight of Misuko's knife in his bag and Clementine's body in his lap, Tommy set off for home.

Chapter End Notes

If you follow me on twitter (which I recommend you do, I don't tweet often and I'll give updates on the story when needed), then you saw that I started band camp a bit ago. Saturday was our last day, so I finally had some time to write, although today was my first day of classes so I'll still be a bit busy.

Recently, I've seen some acephobia on twitter due to QPR's, especially towards bunflower, who writes [Bones in the Ocean](#) which portrays emeralduo as a qpr. (check it out, its a fantastic fic) Anyways, I was leaving Tommy and Sean's relationship pretty vague cause their characters both don't care about labels and stuff like that, but fuck it, I'm the author, so I've added the qpr tag. If you think platonic relationships are shipping, please leave, I'm not gonna have acephobes reading my stuff lmao.

Kudos, bookmarks, subs, and comments are all very appreciated! (I read all your bookmarks too 🥰). See yall soon! <3

cloth

Chapter Summary

cloth - both hands raised, palms facing the body, thumbs rubbing over the pads of the other fingers in a horizontal motion

-

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Tommy dashed through the village center, heart pounding in his chest to the rhythm of the ringing bell. Ender, he just hoped Clementine was okay in the doomsday shack. If this was what he thought it was...

Please don't be Dream.

Chapter Notes

Remember when I said in chapter 16 that I had two chapters that'd been written since the very beginning, and that ch 16 was one of them? Well, this is half of the other one. It's been through so many edits due to the changes in the story, but at its core, it's still the same chapter I wrote back in February.

I've been waiting to show yall this one for a while :)

Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Two months later...

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Tommy dashed through the village center, heart pounding in his chest to the rhythm of the ringing bell. Ender, he just hoped Clementine was okay in the doomsday shack. If this was what he thought it was...

Please don't be Dream.

But there was no shouting, no burning buildings, not even a violent pillager. In fact, for a village under attack, it was awfully quiet.

The courtyard was empty, so Tommy kept running until he saw a crowd ahead. It was mostly those geared up for a fight and a few curious bystanders watching from their porch. What they were watching, Tommy hadn't seen yet.

Isla ran up to him, bow in hand. "Tommy, there's four guys decked head to toe in netherite asking about a guy in a mask."

"Shit," Tommy cursed, "Alright, lemme talk to them."

He felt awfully alone without Sean by his side. Any other day, Tommy would have been able to leave Clementine in arms he trusted, but Sean had taken a trip to another village to help a fellow farmer with a plague affecting his crops. Tommy cursed Sean's bleeding heart.

Please don't be Dream.

Isla led him through the crowd, her fingers still tight around his bow. Tommy wondered how scary these guys were if she was frightened. Isla had kept him from stealing bread a few times with just her stare.

Please don't be Dream.

Tommy stepped forward and got his first good look at the intruders.

Shit. *Shit. Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck.*

There, standing in Tommy's village were four people he never thought he'd see again. Philza, Techno, and Tubbo had their weapons out and seemed to be giving the villagers death stares. Behind them, Ranboo was holding onto the lead of a pack horse, and he seemed to be on the lookout for something.

Fuck.

Alright, he could do this.

Tubbo looked so much older. Tommy just wanted to spend an hour taking in this new face that seemed so familiar yet so alien. How many years had it been? More than three, right? Tubbo was twenty, a proper man now.

His horns were almost full grown, and they no longer resembled anything like Schlatt. Instead of the iconic curved ram horns, Tubbo's arched back in a gentle slope. The fierce frown and dark circles, though, now *those* looked like Schlatt.

Focus. You have a daughter to protect.

Tommy opened his mouth to call to them, but for the first time in a while, his voice faltered. Isla must have noticed and stepped up beside him. Thank Ender she— and a few other villagers— had learned sign language all those years ago.

"What do you want?" Tommy signed. Isla translated for him, almost yelling across the open field separating the village from his old friends.

Ender, he hoped they didn't look too closely. Tommy had looked in a mirror often enough to know there was no way they'd recognize him from his face. He'd grown a beard for Ender's sake, and his muscles actually filled out his stature. But paranoia never really went away, and Techno was way too good at noticing things he shouldn't.

“We’ve heard there’s a person in the area that fights with a mask on,” Phil said. Fuck, he sounded exactly the same. Tommy wondered if his hair had gone gray under his helmet. He almost laughed, easily caught in the familiar joke, before he remembered what was happening and schooled himself.

Wait. *Fuck*. Phil’s words hit Tommy. They were looking for a masked man, and it certainly wasn’t him.

Tommy’s fist clenched around his sword. “*You’re looking for Dream.*”

Isla repeated Tommy’s words, faltering on the name. “You’re looking for— he said you’re looking for a dream?”

That seemed to throw Phil for a loop. Tubbo simply narrowed his eyes, as if he could see something the others couldn’t.

“Not *a* dream. Dream— he’s a person. How do you know about him?”

“*I’ve heard of him.*” It wasn’t a lie. Enough rumors passed through the village that most people were familiar with the infamous name.

Tubbo looked like he was staring into Tommy’s soul, but he said nothing. Tommy’s blood chilled.

Techno spoke up, “Then you know he’s around here.”

“*Wrong guy. We’ve got someone running around in a mask nearby, but it’s definitely not Dream.*”

“And you know this, how?”

Tommy shrugged, fighting to keep his posture as relaxed as possible. Techno could read him like a fucking book if he slipped at all. *“Dream’s got that creepy smile mask, right? Our guy’s got some raccoon thing going on.”*

Philza frowned. “Raccoon thing?”

Isla spoke up from beside Tommy. “I’ve seen him. His mask is shaped like a raccoon face, it’s got ears and everything.”

Tommy casually pointed at Isla. *“What she said.”*

Tubbo finally spoke up. “Who’s to say it’s not just Dream in a different mask?”

Tommy internally groaned. *“Our guy does good, I hear Dream’s not very nice. Doesn’t make sense for him to go around saving cats from trees.”*

“I heard he’s fought a lot of people.”

Isla stepped forward just slightly. It was barely a shift, but enough for any fighters to pick up on it, and they were all wired for battle. “They deserved it.”

“Dream used to say that.”

Used to, Tommy noted.

“What happened to him?”

Philza's hand twitched on his sword hilt. "He angered some people."

A slight movement caught Tommy's eye, and he flicked his gaze over to Ranboo. He had his fist over his face— was he covering a laugh?

"And you're looking for him, why?" Isla asked.

"Revenge," Techno clipped. Phil seemed content to leave it at that. Tubbo just kept staring, and it was starting to freak Tommy out.

Tommy snorted. How very Techno. *"Well, you aren't going to find him here. I suggest you move on."*

Please, please , just leave it at that.

"I think we'd like—" Philza was cut off by a sudden movement beside him. Tommy watched Tubbo snap into action, and he didn't even realize he was Tubbo's target until he had Tommy pinned up against a building.

"Woah, woah, woah!" Isla shouted, holding her arms out to uselessly guard the crowd behind her. Tommy could see Techno out of the corner of his eye— he was tense, Tubbo was going off-script.

Tubbo shoved Tommy's forearm upwards so it was pressed by his head. "Where the fuck did you get that?"

Tommy's brain short-circuited. "What?" he said aloud. Philza and Technoblade were holding back Isla and the rest of the crowd with the threat of unsheathed swords.

"The bandana," Tubbo gritted, "Where did you get it?"

Oh fuck. Tommy had his green bandana wrapped around his wrist. Clementine had pulled it out of his memory chest the other day and insisted he wear it. He only meant to keep it on for a few hours.

“It’s just a bandana, why the fuck are you threatening me over it?” Tommy shot, dodging the question.

Tubbo looked murderous. “Answer my question.”

“I don’t know where I got it, it’s just a piece of cloth!”

His arm was pressed harder. “You’re lying.” Techno seemed to be panicking slightly behind Tubbo. Tommy could have laughed, had he lost his taste for innocent blood?

“Don’t know what you mean, big man.”

Oh shit, Tommy hadn’t meant for that to slip out. He tried to school his face into something neutral, but Tubbo’s eyes were already widening.

The pressure on his arm intensified. Tubbo seemed to be looking for something on his face. “What’s your name?”

Tommy cringed. Fuck. Tubbo was going to figure it out, he never could lie to Tubbo.

Philza called from behind them. “Do you know this guy, Tubbo?”

Tubbo’s eyes bored through him. “Depends on what he says.”

And what the fuck was that supposed to mean?

“Name, now,” Techno ordered.

Behind Techno, Tommy could see Ranboo shifting uncomfortably from side to side. He wouldn’t meet Tommy’s eyes, of course, but Ranboo’s body language always revealed more than his expression. He knew. Ranboo knew, somehow, and he wasn’t saying anything.

“How’d you figure it out so quickly?” Tommy called, directing his words towards Ranboo. He was grasping at straws, trying to take the heat off of himself, *something*.

The half-enderman flinched. Techno and Phil turned to him, but Tubbo stayed focused on him. Tommy was playing it by ear, but if he could distract Tubbo... somehow grab Clementine on the way out? He cursed under his breath. There were so many things in the house he would have to grab; there was no way he could be on the run with a toddler.

Besides, Tommy was tired of running. This was his village, his *home*. He wasn’t going to let someone shove him away from his family again.

“Ranboo?” Techno asked.

Tommy couldn’t see Ranboo very well with Tubbo in front of him, but he was willing to bet that he was vibrating with nerves.

“I don’t know what he’s talking about,” Ranboo said.

“Ranboo.”

Tommy pushed against Tubbo slightly, just to test, but he pushed back, sending Tommy back to square one. Shit.

“Is this what you look like under the mask, Dream? Did you kill Tommy and take his bandana as a trophy?” Tubbo was practically spitting.

What?

Tommy could feel his eyes widen almost comically. “I’m not Dream.”

Tubbo shoved him again. “Then how did you get Tommy’s bandana?”

Tommy winced— that was going to leave some bruises.

“Tubbo, I think—” Ranboo started.

“Ranboo, shut up,” Tubbo snapped. Tommy was shocked again. Had Tubbo ever yelled at Ranboo? Philza and Techno barely reacted, was this a new normal for Tubbo? His hair looked lighter than normal, like he’d been in the sun more than usual, and his jaw had sharpened over the years. Was he taller?

“Name.” Tubbo broke him out of his thoughts.

Please, if there’s a God out there, just let Clementine be safe.

“It’s been a while, huh, Tubbo? Good to see you, man.” Tommy couldn’t say it outright, couldn’t confess. He’d been keeping this secret for years.

Techno stiffened, almost dropping his axe. He knew. *Oh Ender, Techno knew where he lived — knew where his daughter lived.*

Tubbo's eyes locked onto Tommy's. "If you don't tell me who you are in the next ten seconds, I will run you through with my sword."

What the fuck had happened to Tubbo?

"Tubbo..." Technoblade warned.

Tommy tried to put a smile on his face. "You wouldn't want to kill your best friend, would you?"

There was a gasp from somewhere behind Tubbo. Bets on Phil.

Tubbo seemed to freeze for a second, processing the information. His eyes roamed over Tommy, taking in every inch of him. He took a deep breath in. "Tommy?"

"Yes?"

Tubbo pulled Tommy into a crushing hug, released him in a second, and then shoved him back against the wall.

"Ow, what the fuck, Tubbo?"

"You left!" Tubbo shouted, and only then did Tommy notice the tears in his eyes. "You left me, and I thought you were dead. Three years, Tommy! Three fucking years, and I thought I'd never see you again!" His hands were holding onto Tommy's shoulders like he would collapse without him.

"That was the plan," Tommy said.

Fuck. That was not what he should have said.

Tubbo paled. “What?”

“Nothing.”

“No, what do you mean that was the plan?”

Tommy winced. “I never meant to see any of you all again.”

Tubbo released his shoulders and took a step back. His mouth was moving, trying to push out words, but his vocal cords must have missed the memo. Tommy knew the feeling. He stepped away from his reach, still on edge.

“Is it really you?” Phil looked like he was seeing a ghost. Well, metaphorically.

Tommy glanced at the crowd of villagers— some of them were still holding weapons, ready for an attack that Tommy hoped wasn’t coming.

The gravity of the situation started to wash over Tommy, and he felt his breath quicken just slightly. If Clementine were here, she probably would have started headbutting him. But she wasn’t, and Tommy’s throat closed up.

“Why don’t we talk somewhere else?” Tommy suggested. Isla jumped in to translate again. Although he had grown close to the others over the years, he was not ready to spill his tragic backstory in front of them all.

Phil and Techno both gave his hands an odd look, obviously wondering why he was using sign language, but they didn’t say anything.

Surprisingly, Ranboo stepped forward, his weapon stashed away, not even on his hotbar. At some point he had tied up the pack horse to a fence, and his hands were empty.

“Lead the way,” he said.

Tommy gave him a curt nod and turned his back on them, hoping Tubbo wasn’t about to spear him through. He rested a hand on Isla’s shoulder. *“You can stand down, Isla. We’ll be at my place. Thank you.”*

“Are they safe?” Ender, Tommy could have hugged her. No invasive questions, no babying, just simply looking out for him.

“I wouldn’t say that, but I’ll be okay.”

Isla looked like she wanted to say something else but remembered the crowd around them. “Alright everyone, false alarm! You can go back home.” With that, she headed down the path to the town center, most of the villagers following her.

“Right, follow me, men,” Tommy instinctually signed, still not looking back. Once he remembered they couldn’t understand him, he waved his hand for them to follow.

His house was on the edge of the village. If they decided to attack, he could lead them away from the civilians. Maybe grab a few items first? Would he have enough time to open his panic room? Oh Ender, he’d have to travel with a toddler.

No. He wasn’t running.

Shit. Clementine was still hiding in the shack. Tommy bit his lip to keep from cursing out loud. He absolutely did not want his ex-family to know he had a daughter, but it seemed his hands were a little tied. Tommy couldn’t leave her alone for much longer; eventually she’d get bored of the vibrating redstone and make her way out of the little safe house. She was too

smart for her own good, even without sight she seemed to navigate the world much better than most kids her age, and Tommy was scared at how well she could use door knobs.

If Tommy brought them to his house, he might be able to stall and ask another villager to go fetch her, maybe Jill's family? But his house was covered in baby things, and the crayon drawings hung up on the walls would be fairly incriminating.

Besides, Tommy really wanted Clementine in his arms right now.

The house appeared over the horizon. Tommy sighed and pulled out his book. *I have to grab something quickly, you all can stay at the house or follow me, your choice.* He gestured to his home. *Won't take long.*

There was a pause. Tommy still kept his gaze forward. He didn't know if he'd start running or punching if he had to look at any of them in the face.

"I think we'll stick with you," Ranboo answered.

That was interesting, Tommy didn't remember Ranboo having a backbone. Well, that was harsh, but Ranboo seemed much more confident in himself than he did years ago. Tommy figured they'd all grown up.

Sure, right this way.

Tommy wound his way through the forest that bordered the village, turning at the almost invisible notches in the trees he'd put there when he built the safe house. He let the noises of nature fill his ears and kept quiet. The years where he needed to fill silence with mindless chatter and insults were far behind him.

They approached the lone lever Tommy used to control the redstone of the safe house. He flicked it down and felt the almost undetectable movement of blocks beneath his feet still. Only after months of raising Clementine had he adjusted his senses to reflect hers.

Tommy ducked around the tree's low hanging branches and pushed them out of the way to reveal a door hidden in a small hill by its roots. He could have easily hid the safe house deep underground, but if something happened to him, Tommy wanted a way for her to get out. Clementine was smart enough to know how to make her way to the village. Besides, it was locked from the inside.

He knocked six times on the door to the waltzy beat of Mellohi. Something shifted slightly inside but stayed mostly still. Good. Clementine remembered his directions.

Tommy used his vocal chords to create the sound somewhere between humming and growling that Clementine loved. She already associated it with safety and family, so Tommy used it to let her know it was him when he trained her for emergencies.

As soon as the vibrations reached Clementine, Tommy heard her approach. A slight footstep right in front of the door, until—

“What are you doing?” Phil asked.

Tommy flung his hand up to silence him, but it was too late. Clementine's motions stopped.

He hummed again, keeping his voice low and comforting. “It's alright, I've just brought a few guests.” Tommy could practically feel Techno tense a few feet away from him.

Slowly, the door cracked open, and Tommy looked down to see a small leafy ear poke out.

“Everything's fine, Clementine. You can come out.” Tommy crouched down, arms out.

Clementine, ever shy around strangers, kept her face mostly hidden behind her hair and one ear angled to the people behind Tommy. As soon as she was close enough, Tommy scooped

her up into his arms. Something behind his chest loosened, and he let out a breath he hadn't realized he was holding.

"I'm okay, it was a false alarm," Tommy murmured. His fingers were already tapping out Morse code on Clementine's back. *S A F E. S A F E. S A F E.*

She buried her face into the crook of Tommy's neck. "Promise?"

"Promise." Ender, Tommy hoped he wasn't lying.

Finally, with his daughter in his arms, Tommy felt just strong enough to face his old friends behind him.

Chapter End Notes

So..... haha, how we feeling? I know everyone was expecting Dream cause that's what I've been teasing, but this has always been the plan. I just let yall think otherwise >:) We're nearing the endgame now, my friends. It's a bit crazy to think that I'm going to finish something I've been working on for half a year now (and I know it's still going to take a bit more time). Like, what do I do when this is done? (That's a lie, I've had a benchtrio story in my head for months now. More on that later, maybe) Still, this story was one of the only things keeping me going some days, other than my family, so it's gonna be a bit tough letting it go. I'm just glad some of yall stuck with me for the ride. I love how im going on this whole thing about endings when we have like six or seven chapters chapters left lmao. I'm being so dramatic.

Anyway, I hope yall liked this chapter. I'm a bit nervous about posting it (which I'm not normally), so some love in the comments would be much appreciated. As always, I'll see you in the next one <3

Edit: I've just now noticed I've missed 30 minutes of a wilbur stream. Fuck me

dad

Chapter Summary

dad - Index and middle finger of one hand tap the knuckles of the index and middle finger on the other hand twice

-

Finally, with his daughter in his arms, Tommy felt just strong enough to face his old friends behind him.

Chapter Notes

its a long one :) enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo looked shell shocked, his axe long put away in his inventory. His eyes were no longer locked on Tommy but instead on his daughter. Techno looked like he was concentrating on something, and Tommy figured he'd never know if Techno didn't tell him. He never really figured out what was in Technoblade's head.

Phil looked like someone had whacked him upside the head. Tommy wondered if the last time he had seen a child was when Wilbur could still rest Fundy on his hip. Well, a child that hadn't been terrorized into early maturity.

Tommy didn't quite know what to say. They seemed to be waiting for him to explain... something, but how could he summarize the last few years of his life?

"Let's head home," Tommy directed towards Clementine. She mumbled something in response, but Tommy could barely hear her with her face in his chest.

He stepped past Ranboo, silently thanking Ender that there was someone to act as a buffer between him and the others. Ranboo had been nothing but kind to him in exile, and Tommy would never forget that. Maybe even now, Ranboo was still helping him.

Clementine fell asleep in his arms on the way home. She must have drained herself focusing on the moving pistons while Tommy was gone, and his walking always put her to sleep.

The sun was reaching the horizon by the time Tommy stepped onto his front porch. He unlocked his door, suddenly hyper aware of the two deadbolts he had installed in the spruce door. Tommy flipped off the door as they entered, tradition as always.

The house was just as he'd left it, chests flung open and now-done potions sitting on the brewing stand. Tommy gently lay Clementine on her bed in the other room and tucked in the quilt, humming the whole time. Her eyes were closed, thankfully. Tommy wasn't sure he was ready for them to figure out Clementine was blind. Just another weakness to take advantage of. He tapped another message in Morse on her chest and faced his guests.

Tommy sighed. He felt like he'd been doing that a lot today. "Sorry for the mess, I wasn't exactly expecting a peaceful visit."

No response.

Tommy raised his hands, and signed as clearly as possible, "*Can any of you understand me?*"

Blank faces stared back.

"What are you doing with your hands, mate?" Phil asked, a hesitant tone in his voice like he was worried he was offending Tommy.

That answered that question. Tommy wasn't sure if he was relieved that he could communicate with the villagers in secret or exhausted at the prospect of continuing to speak out loud.

“Don’t worry about it. You can sit down,” he gestured to his table, which, unfortunately, only had four chairs. “Can I get you all anything to eat? Drink?”

No one answered until Ranboo took a seat. “Just water please.”

“Right.” Tommy almost felt bad for Ranboo. But he couldn’t, not with the life of his daughter and himself on the line. He shut out the feelings of pity and hope creeping up inside and focused on the task at hand. Figure out what they wanted with Dream. Make sure the village was safe. Get them to leave and never come back. Easy.

“So you’re looking for Dream, huh?” Tommy started. That was safe. He hated Dream, they apparently hated Dream. No animosity there. He put the kettle on the stove.

Techno nodded. “We were. Don’t know if that’s still happening now.”

“What? Why?”

Tubbo spoke up. “I was only helping because I thought Dream killed you.”

Ah. “Well, he didn’t— obviously.”

“Obviously,” Techno echoed drily. He was still standing by the door, even after the other three had sat by the table. Still the same paranoid bastard Tommy used to know. That was refreshing, at least.

“We thought you were dead, Tommy,” Tubbo said.

Tommy fiddled with the straps of his armor. “I’m not.” What more could he say?

“That...” Tubbo took a breath in, “that tower at Logstedshire.”

Fuck. He’d almost managed to forget about that. In fact, he’d almost managed to forget about his time in the Dream SMP entirely, but Tubbo did always have the best timing when it came to his unresolved trauma.

“*That* was years ago, Tubbo. Water under the bridge,” Tommy said.

Tubbo looked like he’d been hit. He didn’t have the right to, Tommy was the one that got shoved into a wall that day.

“Tommy...” Phil trailed off.

“Drop it, Philza.”

The tea kettle went off, and Tommy jumped at the chance to pour water into five mugs filled with tea bags. It wasn’t until he was handing everyone their drinks that he realized he’d made their favorites. It certainly didn’t pass by Techno who gave him an odd look after a taste.

Tommy sipped on his own drink, a herbal tea he didn’t normally enjoy, but Ender did he need the relaxation right now.

“What’s with the Morse code?” Techno asked.

Tommy was a bit thrown. Three years, and that’s what he asks first?

“She likes it.” It was a bit more than that, but he wasn’t just going to throw all of Clementine’s secrets at Techno.

“And the growling?”

Tommy took another sip. The tea wasn't working particularly well. “It's more like humming.”

Techno just glared at him.

“And she likes it. End of story,” Tommy said.

“She's a hybrid.”

“She is.”

“You're being awfully secretive.”

Tommy glared at him. “I'm protecting my daughter.”

Techno didn't look surprised, but Phil did suck in another breath. Tommy glanced at Tubbo—he seemed hyperfocused on a point on the wall. Tommy wondered if he was even listening.

“Is she biologically yours?”

“Does it matter?” Tommy snapped back.

Techno set his mug on the table and leaned forward. “I wondered if you knew what type of hybrid she was.”

“What is this, an interrogation?”

“I just thought I should get to know her.”

Tommy stiffened. Techno *never* wanted to socialize just to socialize, and Techno knew that Tommy knew that. Techno was messing with him, pushing his limits, seeing when Tommy would snap.

Fuck Techno’s mind games. Tommy had grown tired of words that wrapped him up in a mess of unspoken meanings and connotations the second Wilbur had started to fall off the deep end in Pogtopia. After years of unpacking Dream’s words and actions, Tommy had a sixth sense for manipulation.

Tommy spoke calmly, “What do you want, Techno?”

“You’ve been gone for quite a while, I wanted to know what you’ve been up to.”

“When you arrived at Pogtopia, it’d been a long time since we’d seen each other. You didn’t seem interested in ‘what I’d been up to’ then. So, why now?” Another sip of tea.

Techno was about to speak when Tubbo interrupted him, eyes finally focused on the conversation again. “You said you never wanted to see us again.”

Tommy flinched. Tubbo sounded *empty*.

“That’s not what I said.”

“What did you say then?”

“I said I never meant to see you again. There’s a difference.”

Tubbo narrowed his eyes. “I thought Wilbur was the wordsmith between you two.”

Tommy flinched again at the mention of Wilbur, his gaze flicking to the sword hanging on Philza’s belt.

“I missed you all, but I wasn’t planning on coming back to L’manburg.”

Tubbo glared at Techno. “Well you’re in luck. There’s no L’manburg anymore.”

“What?”

Techno gave him a sarcastic salute. “Phil and I withered and blew it to bedrock.”

Tommy almost dropped his mug. “What? Why?”

“They tried to execute me.”

“You did blow up our country and kill me,” Tubbo muttered.

“And you all betrayed my trust!” Techno shouted.

Tommy’s eyes whipped over to the room where Clementine was sleeping. “Technoblade, I swear to Ender if you wake up my kid with your hissy fit, I will kick you out of my house.” He placed a hand on the counter and closed his eyes for a second, feeling for vibrations. Nothing. Tommy breathed a sigh of relief.

“Why didn’t you want to come home?” Phil asked.

“What home? Logstedshire? L’manburg?”

“You knew we lived nearby.”

“The last time I spoke to Techno he told me to die and then spawned a bunch of hell creatures on top of my house. The last time I saw you, you had a sword through my— through Wilbur’s chest. Forgive me if I didn’t think you would be welcoming,” Tommy snapped, keeping his voice low.

Techno snorted. “He’s got a point.”

“You could have left us a note,” Tubbo said.

“A note would have wasted time,” Tommy explained, “and seeing how I was running for my life, I figured my best shot would be to leave without a trace.”

“Running for your life?”

Tommy clenched the countertop. “Dream wasn’t just going to let me leave, was he?”

“The deal was that you were exiled, not trapped in Logstedshire!”

“When has Dream ever played fair?” Tommy countered.

“And you didn’t fight back? I’ve never known you to run from something, Tommy! Never!” Tubbo’s voice was raised, but Tommy was losing more and more of his patience.

Tommy threw off his chestplate and untucked his shirt, almost ripping it apart. He unbuttoned it to reveal his torso. Tommy didn’t need to look down to remember the scars littered across his body.

“Stabbed,” he pointed and said, and turned around to show them the exit wound.

“Burned,” a pink scar on his abdomen from a Fire Aspect sword.

“Beaten,” permanent discoloration on his ribs.

“Choked,” a line above his collarbones from an axe.

“Exploded,” every inch of his skin was spotted with tiny burns from sparks, but his chest was covered in a waxy red sheen centered on his sternum.

“And once I was about to die, clinging onto life, he’d splash me with a health potion so he could do it the next day. And the next. And the next. He blew up all my stuff, did you know? My food, my tools, my weapons. Every. Single. Day. It’s a wonder I didn’t die to a stray creeper. So forgive me if I took the coward’s way out.”

With that, Tommy buttoned his shirt back up and crossed his arms. While his outburst had felt good in the moment, he now felt too vulnerable.

Ranboo was crying.

“You asked how I knew,” he said, “the scar on your neck. I— I visited you after that, but I forgot about it.”

Ranboo tried to wipe the tears off his cheeks, but they were already irritating his skin.

“I’m sorry,” Ranboo said.

Tommy took a deep breath in and out and tried to calm down. It had been satisfying to weaponize his trauma, to use his spite as a weapon and drive it into their chests, but he had to be the better person here.

The bigger man, Tommy thought.

“I’m sorry too, I shouldn’t have done that,” he apologized, “but my point still stands. I wish I could have let you all know I was safe, but I don’t regret my actions. And neither should you, Ranboo, you were the only one to visit when it mattered.”

Tubbo looked like he really, *really* wanted to punch something, and it set Tommy on edge. If Tubbo was going to start yelling at him again, Tommy was going to actually get angry.

“He was abusing you,” Tubbo whispered, harsh and laced with something that sounded like regret.

“Call it what you want.”

Ranboo put his face in his hands. “That’s abuse.”

“And I told you, I’m over it.”

“Tommy, you—”

He cut Phil off with his hand, feeling minute vibrations travel from Clementine's bed up through the counter.

The door to the bedroom creaked open and Clementine stepped out. She was facing Tommy, her back to the others, but she had an ear angled towards them immediately.

"I heard shouting," she whispered.

Tommy crouched and held his arms out for her to climb into. Ender, she was getting big.

"Sorry, Clem. Dad was talking, and he got a bit upset," Tommy said. Clementine shoved her face into his chest like always, and he hummed a random tune.

"I have better hearing than you," Techno said.

What?

Tommy frowned, placing his arm and hand on Clementine's back and head to hold her close. "Yes, you do."

"I didn't hear her until she opened the door."

Fear shot through Tommy, but he was careful to keep his face neutral. "I was listening for her. What's with you and asking questions about my daughter?" Clementine tensed slightly at his tone, so Tommy resumed the humming.

Techno held his hands up in fake surrender. "Woah, calm down there, mama bear. I'm not gonna do anything."

“Why should I believe you?”

Techno’s eyes widened. “You really think I’d hurt a kid? I mean, unless she’s an orphan.”

The joke didn’t land. Phil just put his head in his hands with a sigh.

Tommy chose to ignore Techno’s horrible sense of social rules, partially because he didn’t even know how to answer that, and partially because he could feel his hands itching to punch something. “I seem to remember you assassinating a teenager and threatening another.”

“He was the president of a tyrannical government coup!”

Tubbo muttered, “And I did forgive him for that.”

“And what was I, Technoblade? I could easily have lost a canon life to one of your pet withers.”

Techno frowned. “I’ve retired from the whole... wither thing.”

“Is that why you’re sitting in my dining room in fully enchanted netherite armor?”

“So are you!”

Tommy almost shot back, almost let himself get sucked into the argument. That was the problem with Techno, if he couldn’t fight physically, he’d antagonize you in other ways.

Ender, he was exhausted. All Tommy wanted was to close his throat and never open it again, just rely on his hands and others to speak for him. But he couldn’t look weak, so he opened his mouth again.

“All I’m saying,” he croaked, “is that I don’t trust you to not attack me.”

“We’re your friends, Tommy, we’re practically family!” Tubbo said.

Tommy shook his head. “I have a daughter and an older brother who died four years ago. That’s it.”

“You still have us even if you don’t want us,” Phil said.

“That is *not* the problem, Philza. For a long time I still wanted you, and I *never* had you. My exile was months long, and the only person in this room that cared was Ranboo. Not you, not Techno, not Tubbo.”

Ranboo spoke up. “Phil, remember what I told you.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. There was a lot Ranboo could be saying with that sentence, and Tommy did not appreciate being kept in the dark.

“Right, thank you, Ranboo,” Phil said, “I’m sorry, Tommy, that I never visited. It’s not an excuse, but Techno told me how you acted when he visited and I assumed you wouldn’t want to see me, especially after Wilbur. I should have checked up on you, and I regret that.”

Tommy was stunned. Never in his life had he seen Phil backtrack on his actions. He was always steady in his beliefs, a never-faltering rock in a stormy sea. Tommy had been battered against that rock plenty of times in his life, but Phil never budged. He didn’t even think regret was in Philza Minecraft’s vocabulary.

Maybe he wasn’t the only one who changed.

Clementine shifted in her position in Tommy's arms, pressing deeper into his torso. Tommy thought she had gone to sleep again, but she started to hum a familiar tune.

My L'manburg, my l'manburg...

He'd never sung her the lyrics, but on those nights where the nightmares didn't stop, he would hum the melody for her. She was almost as attached to the tune as Mellohi.

The vibrations of her tiny vocal chords flitted through his body like a hummingbird in a field of flowers. Tommy could see the spots on her chest glow just slightly through her shirt.

"Thank you, Clem," he whispered. Ender, he was so proud of her.

"So you didn't leave everything behind," Tubbo pointed out. Clementine kept humming, just enough for Tommy to feel but barely hear.

"The only songs I knew were Wilbur's, and it was the only way she'd stop crying. I would have forgotten it long ago if she wasn't so attached."

Techno looked at Clementine again, and every bone in Tommy's body screamed at him to hide her deep underground where no one would ever find her again.

"She's a smart kid. Clementine, right?" Techno asked.

Tommy nodded, hoping Techno got the message and stopped prying into his daughter's business. Unfortunately, Clementine heard her name and looked up at Tommy.

"Can I say hi?" she asked.

Instinctively, Tommy almost said no, but Clementine was facing him, her eyes slightly focused on something behind him but still filled with curiosity. Ender, this kid had him wrapped around her finger and he didn't even care.

"Sure, just remember your manners, alright?"

She gave him a toothy smile and wriggled out of his arms. Ranboo, who was sitting closest to Tommy, gave her a little wave.

"Hello, my name is Ranboo."

Clementine paused, ears twitching, and returned the wave she must have felt in the air. Tommy smiled, she was getting so good at sensing the things around her. *Independent*, his mind supplied, but he shoved it down and focused on the then and now.

Ranboo was sitting down, but Clementine was still only as tall as his knees. She didn't seem to mind, however, and placed a hand on his leg. Tommy knew from experience she was sending out little vibrations to scope out Ranboo, but his normal human senses were never quite good enough to feel them.

She giggled and climbed into Ranboo's lap. Tommy was about to reach out and apologize to the poor guy before she grabbed his ears and giggled again. "You're like me!"

Clementine had met a few other hybrids before, but they were all legacies with minor traits. Small villages like his own were not as kind to hybrids as the Dream SMP had been. Tommy had no idea what Ranboo was, but he had to be less than half human, and Clementine seemed fascinated. His heart broke. Should he have made more of an effort for her to meet other hybrids?

Tommy was still frozen in a half-lunge to rescue Ranboo, unsure what to do. The tension broke when Ranboo laughed and steadied Clementine on his lap.

“I am. I’m an enderman hybrid.”

“Endermen don’t have ears,” she said.

Tommy wanted to slam his head on the counter. Years of raising her to be polite and it all goes out the window when she meets someone else with weird ears.

“Well,” Ranboo laughed again, “I’m something else, too, I just don’t know.”

At least that was still a mystery.

Clementine seemed to soak up Ranboo’s laugh. Tommy could just barely see the glow under her shirt and hoped the others weren’t paying enough attention.

She moved her hands to Ranboo’s shoulders and gasped. “You have another heart!”

Tommy dropped his head in his hands.

Why did he have to have a daughter who was constantly fascinated by people’s internal organs?

“Clementine, what did we talk about?” he said.

“I shouldn’t talk about people’s insides.” She giggled again, hands back to Ranboo’s ears. He looked a bit in shock.

“I’m sorry, did your daughter just tell me I have a second heart?”

Phil spoke up, “Endermen have another organ for teleportation, that’s what the pearls are. I heard they pulsed a bit like a heartbeat, but I always thought it was a rumor.”

Ranboo froze. “I can’t teleport.”

Clementine poked Ranboo right in between his collarbones. “It’s right there.”

“That’s where it is in endermen,” Phil said.

“Tommy,” Techno said, “mind telling me how your kid is able to x-ray-vision Ranboo’s organs?”

“Well, you see...”

Tommy was interrupted by Ranboo and Tubbo simultaneously gasping and shouting.

“Is she glowing?”

“Is Clementine blind?”

Ranboo had noticed Clementine’s chest pulsing to the beat of his pearl. Tommy hadn’t seen it so bright in a long time.

Tubbo must have tried to make eye contact with her, seen her unfocused eyes, and put the pieces together.

Tommy didn’t know what to do. His daughter was more than a foot away from him, in the arms of a potentially dangerous almost-stranger who had just discovered his ability to

teleport. If any of them tried to keep Tommy away from her, there was a good chance they'd succeed.

"Clementine," Tommy's voice was shaking, "can you come back to Dad for a second?"

"*Danger*," he signed, hoping Clementine was paying attention. It wasn't a sign she was very familiar with, but he had to hope.

Her ears swiveled his way, and she must have picked up on the trembling of his hands, or maybe his heart rate, because she climbed off Ranboo without protest. He let her go.

Clementine scrambled back into his arms and Tommy let out the breath he was holding. He tapped Morse code on her back, but it almost felt like it was for him more than her. S A F E. S A F E. S A F E.

"Tommy, mate, I know you want to protect your daughter, but I think you're going to have to explain a bit to us, especially Ranboo," Phil said.

Techno seemed like he was a few seconds away from figuring it out on his own, so Tommy bit the bullet.

"She can sense vibrations. Yes, she's glowing, and yes, she's blind."

"That explains the humming," Ranboo said.

"I told you she likes it."

Techno looked sharply up from the table directly at Tommy. *Ah, he knows*.

"Tommy."

“Yes, Technoblade.”

Techno’s hands had disappeared somewhere by his side. Tommy held onto Clementine tighter.

“You know what kind of hybrid she is.”

“I do.”

Techno hissed, ears flattening against his head. “Tommy, do you know how dangerous she could be?”

“You are a piglin, do *not* lecture me about dangerous.”

“Piglins can’t kill a fully armored man in two hits, Tommy.”

Tommy kept tapping, muscle memory taking over. “And neither can she! She’s a toddler, for Ender’s sake!”

“Woah, woah. Slow down,” Phil said, holding up his hands placatingly, “You lost me.”

“She’s a Warden hybrid, Phil.”

Tubbo and Ranboo didn’t seem to recognize the name, but Phil certainly did. His eyes flicked over to Clementine and back to Techno.

“What’s a Warden?” Tubbo asked.

“A Warden,” Techno started, “is an extremely rare mob. The caves in the SMP aren’t deep enough to spawn any, that’s why you’ve never heard of it. They’re completely blind, but they’ve got the ability to hear through vibrations. I’ve heard they’re twice the size of a human, bloodthirsty, and able to snap your neck with a slight swing, but I wouldn’t know because *I’m* not stupid enough to go anywhere them. I’ve never actually met anyone who’s survived an encounter.”

Tommy winced. “I did.”

Phil must have given himself whiplash by how fast he turned to look at Tommy. “You *what?*”

“I’ve seen a Warden, up close, even, and I’m still alive.”

“Do *not* tell me you found this child in a cave and took her from an adult Warden,” Phil said.

“I didn’t take her from anyone! I went down to a deep cave to see if I could find one when I was trying to figure out what Clementine’s hybrid traits were.”

“Let me get this straight. You voluntarily looked for a Warden because you were curious, and you came out without a scratch?” Techno asked.

Tommy shook his head. “It wasn’t curiosity. Imagine if you were raised without the knowledge of piglins and what they can do, Techno. I needed to know how to teach her.”

“And you needed a Warden for that?” Phil asked.

Tommy nodded. “I needed to know if she was part-Warden first, and then, yes, I needed a Warden.”

“Don’t tell me you managed to kill one,” Techno deadpanned.

“Ender, no. I managed to— to communicate, slightly, I guess.”

Techno looked about as shocked as he could get, which meant his eyebrows were raised and the rest of his face was as static as ever. “You *communicated* .”

Tommy nodded. “Yeah, I realized it heard with vibrations, right? So I just stopped moving and kept quiet. Clementine seemed to like humming, so I just kinda used my vocal chords enough to make a really quiet sound. It responded, sorta? Anyways, I realized it was using the plants down there to hear, so I grabbed a couple, and it let me leave.”

His story was a bit more condensed than the actual event, and it did leave out the part where the Warden almost cracked his skull open on a stone wall, but Tommy did *not* want to tell them about that. Not when Techno seemed seconds away from running or putting a sword through his kid.

“Right,” Ranboo said, “let me get this straight. You’re afraid Clementine is going to do what? Snap and murder you all with her little baby hands?”

Ender, Tommy had missed him.

“We don’t know what she’s capable of,” Phil reasoned.

“May I remind you we don’t know half of what I am? I’ve seen an enderman bite someone’s leg off in one go, and Techno, you are fully capable of murdering an armored man with a pickaxe.”

Techno frowned a bit at that, like Ranboo was reminding him of something unpleasant.

“For all we know,” Ranboo continued, “I could be part killer bunny and one day I’ll go rabid and kill you all— but you still trust me. I think Tommy knows his daughter best, if he says she’s safe, then she’s safe.”

S A F E. S A F E. S A F E.

“If you don’t like it, you can leave,” Tommy offered.

Tubbo held a hand up. “I agree with Ranboo, but we’ve gotten off track.”

“What was the track, barging into my village and threatening everyone?”

“Finding Dream.” Tubbo ignored his remark. “I still think that masked guy might be him, Tommy, even if you say different.”

Tommy didn’t know how to clear his name without revealing it was him behind the mask. Ender, why couldn’t he have just kept the bandana over his face or something. He had to be dramatic and craft something special, something that made him feel like a *hero*.

“Yeah, they’re definitely not. Different masks, different motives, I’ve even met them and they said nothing.”

“We didn’t recognize you,” Techno pointed out.

“It was years ago, I was still a teenager. Besides, Dream always knows things others don’t, I doubt he would miss me, even now.”

“Why are you set on defending this person?” Phil asked.

“They saved my life.” It was true, if Tommy hadn’t had an outlet that first year...

“You almost died?”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “I left Logstedshire with a couple of torches and some dirt. I’ve almost died more than a few times.”

Tubbo frowned. “I don’t think—”

All at once, a multitude of things happened. The front door slammed open, Sean rushing in with a barely used iron sword in his hands. On instinct, everyone else in the room stood up and pulled their weapons out.

Tommy tore his shield out of his hotbar and used it to cover and tuck Clementine into his side at the same time that Techno shoved Sean against the wall, forced him to drop his weapon, and held a shining netherite sword to his throat.

Phil, Tubbo, and Ranboo threw themselves in defensive positions, Phil covering Techno’s back while Tubbo and Ranboo stuck next to each other as well as they could with the table in the wall. Well, that just meant that Tubbo basically shoved his way through Tommy’s very heavy and very solid wood table, which then caused everything on top to tip and fall over. This included Ranboo’s cup of water, which just so happened to splash on his exposed forearm.

With a cry of pain and a *vrwoop*, Ranboo disappeared in a dusting of purple particles and reappeared on the other side of the room on his ass.

Oh. That was a surprise.

Tommy’s attention was brought back to Sean— *why had it left you absolute fucking idiot* — when he let out a pinched noise of pain. The sword was still against his neck, and Tommy could see the indent in his skin where Techno was pressing the edge of the blade.

Tommy was panicking, trying to figure out a solution that would protect Clementine and free Sean at the same time when Clementine let out an ear-piercing wail next to his ear.

All the metal in the room started vibrating, especially the netherite swords held in most of everyone's hands. Tommy dropped his, as did Ranboo and Phil, but Tubbo held tight and Techno simply pulled his back a centimeter.

That was, until, Clementine's volume increased *somehow* and their blades literally ripped themselves out of their grips.

Metal clattered to the floor and Clementine went silent. Tommy could hear the panicked breathing of Sean across the room and some enderman-like rumbling from Ranboo, who seemed a bit out of it, but everything else was silent.

"Technoblade, let go of Sean," Tommy said while signing to Sean, "*You're okay. I promise.*"

Surprisingly, Techno obliged, but Sean must have recognized the name somewhere in his haze of panic.

There was a crack of skin against skin, and Tommy belatedly realized Sean had swung a punch at Techno and *actually hit him*. Sean was cradling his hand from the pain; Tommy wondered if he'd ever punched someone before.

Techno didn't even seem in pain, and he'd obviously written Sean off as a non-threat, either from his response to the fighting or how weak his punch was. He raised an eyebrow in disbelief and gingerly touched his cheek which was steadily growing redder and redder.

"Sean!" Tommy hissed.

“Sorry,” he panted, “I promised myself I’d do that if I ever saw...” He trailed off. Tommy didn’t need to hear the rest to know what he meant. *If I ever saw anyone that hurt you.*

Sean focused his attention back on Techno. “So you’re the End-forsaken bastard that likes to spawn withers on children. Glad we met,” he spat.

Oh Ender, Sean was *pissed*. Tommy had never, *ever* heard a curse come out of his mouth, and here he was, ready to rip Techno to shreds.

Behind his shield, Clementine squealed, “Tata!” and started trying to wriggle out of his grip.

“Tommy,” Techno drawled, “who’s your friend here?”

Tommy bit his lip. “This is, uh... this is Sean, Clementine’s other dad.”

He may as well have set off a bomb the way the room exploded.

Chapter End Notes

So thats everything I had written originally for this fic. We are treading into the unknown from here on out :)

THANK YOU ALL SO MUCH FOR THE LOVE LAST CHAPTER, it took me forever to respond to everyone. My inbox didn't get cleared until thirty minutes ago lol. Also, thank you for 3000 kudos!!!! Holy crap!!! Some of my fav dmsp fics don't have that much, so I want you all to go and send them just as much love through the links below. Leave a nice comment and a cheeky kudos for me :D

Soooooooo 3/4 sbi and 3/3 benchtrio! I wonder if any of those numbers will change through the story hahahahah that'd be crazy, right guys,,,, right? Nah that won't happen. Anyway, where was I? Oh right, I now have to juggle a bunch of characters im not used to lol. Getting used to it, but its definitely a bit of a struggle. Would be a shame if we lost some.

@galahiel did some [beautiful fanart](#) on twitter so please drop them some likes and retweets, its the first fanart ive gotten to see and im still not quite over the concept of

that <3

see yall later!!!!!!

[your wayward children by Khio](#)

[death, be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so by cptFOZZ](#)

[To Let Monsters Rest In Peace by Khoshek](#)

[One Big Human Heart \(Gently Beeping\) by_grasstastic](#)

[of the end of the world by augurspex](#)

[for you, the stars by andthentheybow](#)

[you don't bring me flowers anymore by shrai](#)

[hold onto the stars by whats_sleep](#)

(that was more than anticipated by still check them out :)

peace

Chapter Summary

peace - the index fingers and thumbs touching to form a circle and touching each other to form a figure eight, then separating in an open motion

-

“Tommy,” Techno drawled, “who’s your friend here?”

Tommy bit his lip. “This is, uh... this is Sean, Clementine’s other dad.”

He may as well have set off a bomb the way the room exploded.

Chapter Notes

I want you all to know I regret absolutely nothing

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It took a few minutes of pure confusion and chaos to get everything sorted out. Most of it was Tommy vehemently denying that he had been hiding in the closet for years while Sean covered his giggles with his hands. Phil repeatedly kept saying some sickeningly sincere shit like, “we won’t hate you for who you love,” until Tommy threatened to kick him out. Tubbo joined Sean in laughing.

And then they all remembered Ranboo was sitting in a corner looking like someone had hit him over the head with an anvil. Also, the fact that he teleported.

Which led to where they were now, standing outside Tommy’s house about an hour minutes later.

Techno and Phil were coaching Ranboo through trying to teleport again, a skill he seemingly discovered by accident and Clementine’s x-ray skills. Currently, Ranboo just looked very

constipated but still standing in the same spot he had been in. Apparently Techno and Phil weren't good teachers.

Tubbo was standing on Tommy's left and Sean on his right. Clementine was playing with some god-awful portable redstone contraption that Tubbo pulled out of his inventory just a few meters away.

Honestly, it was quite peaceful.

Tommy leaned his head on Sean's shoulder, finally feeling the exhaustion from the day. Not for the first time, Tommy wondered who he would've become without Sean. Someone he didn't want to be, for sure.

He closed his eyes and hummed a simple tune he heard from a bard passing through the village a few months ago. Tommy didn't need to see to know that Clementine had an ear angled towards him.

"Are you tired?" Sean said, quiet and under his breath.

Tommy nodded slightly, just burying his head in the crook of Sean's neck.

"You can take a nap if you need one." Sean almost sounded like he was laughing.

"Dickhead. Let's just sit down."

And so they did, leaning against Tommy's porch with their legs outstretched onto the soft grass. Tubbo stayed standing, almost awkwardly hovering. Tommy itched to ask him what was wrong, or maybe just to come closer, he wasn't sure. He said nothing. He wasn't sure if he wanted to say anything more tonight.

“You, uh,” Tubbo started. Tommy focused on his voice, let it drift through his left ear and wrap itself somewhere around his brain. “You’re talking with your hands?”

Tommy opened his eyes. Tubbo was stiff as a board, and desperately not looking their way.

“Sean,” Tommy signed, “tell Tubbo to stop acting like he has a stick up his ass and to sit down with us. And if you wouldn’t mind explaining sign for me.”

Sean snorted. Tubbo’s eyes flicked over to the noise.

“Tommy says to stop acting like you have uh, like you have a stick up your butt. You can sit with us. Also, nice to meet you, Tubbo,” Sean said.

Tubbo winced. “Sorry, I just, uh…” He sat down beside Tommy. “It’s been a while. I don’t think my brain has gotten the memo that you aren’t a ghost anymore. Also, hi, Sean.”

Tommy untied the bandana around his wrist, careful with the old fabric. It had lost lots of its green pigment, fading into something a little darker and a little browner, but the texture was still unmistakably from one of Tubbo’s old shirts. Tommy held it out to Tubbo.

Tubbo took it gingerly, turning it over with his fingers. Tommy wondered where its twin was.

“Tommy is speaking sign language— British sign language, specifically,” Sean explained, “he’s not deaf, he just can’t speak right now.”

Tubbo looked up sharply, staring at Tommy’s neck. “Is that because of Dream?”

Tommy shook his head, tapping the side of his head instead.

“It’s...” Sean hesitated, “it’s not a physical thing.”

Tubbo scowled, looking back down at the bandana. “So the tower in Logstedshire wasn’t to try and trick Dream, was it?”

Tommy shook his head.

“Great.” Tubbo dropped the bandana back in Tommy’s hands. “Just great.”

“I’m much better now, Tubbo, I—”

Tubbo cut off Sean’s translation. “But you aren’t! You keep looking at me out of the corner of your eye like you’re waiting for me to stab you or something, and you can’t even *speak* to me! I just—”

He took a deep breath in.

“When you died, I never— I couldn’t get over the fact that I couldn’t apologize to you for everything. And now you’re here,” Tubbo gestured at him wildly, “and just looking at you makes me furious!”

Tommy could see Sean tensing, getting defensive, so he rested his hand on Sean’s arm. They needed to let Tubbo work it out.

There was an awkward pause while Tubbo seemed to grasp for whatever words he was trying to find.

“I got married to Ranboo,” he blurted out.

Tommy blue-screened.

“Wait, married married? Like kisses and roses and gross shit like that?”

“Well Ranboo likes alliums, actually—”

“What the fuck? What the fuck. I’m dreaming, actually, Technoblade went and whacked me on the head and now I’m hallucinating.”

Tubbo gave him a deadpan look. “Can you let me finish?”

Tommy nodded.

“I got married to Ranboo a few months after you died—” *man was that weird to hear* “—at first it was for taxes, cause Eret got mad about us stealing her beacons, anyway, we got married. And then we got a son, Michael, he’s a zombie piglin, about six years old now. I think you two would get along great, he’s very mischievous,” Tubbo smiled just slightly, like he wasn’t aware he was doing it. “My point is, I did all that stuff, but I never really moved on. I still have nightmares about the fireworks and Logstedshire, and there was this whole thing between Ranboo and Dream, and then there was a chance I could avenge your death, but— well, now you’re alive, and I’m not quite sure what to do.”

It took Tommy a moment to parse through Tubbo’s monologue. He’d forgotten how Tubbo always spoke, not quite reaching the point, just dancing around it like a rabbit with a trap—afraid he might spring something he can’t get out of. It was difficult to get Tubbo mad, properly mad enough to shout, and the last time Tommy had heard that... well, it wasn’t pleasant. But just because Tubbo spoke mildly didn’t mean he wasn’t hiding an ocean of emotions deep inside.

Tommy wondered how long it had been since he’d been able to let it all out. To rest.

“You’re still hurting,” Tommy signed slowly, hoping Sean would pick up on his hesitance and translate it into his voice, “You never got a chance to heal, and all this is just bringing it back.”

Tubbo nodded, clearing his throat and looking away. “You seem like you know what you’re talking about. Healing, and all that shit.”

Tommy leaned his head on Tubbo’s shoulder, careful and slow, giving Tubbo plenty of time to move away. He didn’t, and Tommy silently thanked Prime.

“I’ve got a really good friend Misuko, you should meet her some day, and, uh, she didn’t have the best life a couple years ago, like us. She gave me some advice when we first met, which happened to be after I almost beat a man to death— anyway, Misuko told me that healing isn’t just about getting better. Cause people aren’t just the best parts of themselves, right? So feeling angry and sad and just generally like shit is a good sign. Better that than nothing at all.”

Tubbo rested his head against Tommy’s. “I think I’ve gotten pretty used to nothing at all.”

“Good thing you’ve got people that love you to help out.” Tommy gestured lazily towards Ranboo who was currently being chased around by Technoblade and Phil with... pumpkins on their heads? He didn’t want to know. *“Wait, if you’re here right now, where’s your kid?”*

“Michael? Oh, Foolish is babysitting him,” Tubbo said.

“Who the fuck is Foolish?” Sean, again, didn’t translate the curse word.

Tubbo laughed. “He joined about a month after you left. Foolish is, let’s say eccentric. I think he’s an ancient god or something? He loves to build, so Ranboo paid him to build us a mansion in Snowchester— oh god, you don’t know about Snowchester, you’ve missed so much, that’s where we live now— and he’s staying there with Michael while we search for Dream.”

“He sounds like a dickhead.”

Tubbo laughed. “No, he’s nice, just a little odd. Don’t get him started on chandeliers. But enough about Foolish, I want to know what you’ve been up to. How did the great Tommyinnit end up *settling down* of all things?”

“Well, it was mostly thanks to Sean, really.” Tommy sat up, glancing at Sean who had been dutifully translating the whole conversation without complaint. He grinned slightly.

“Are you two married?”

Tommy dropped his face in his hands while Sean snickered. *“I just spent ten whole minutes insisting to Philza Minecraft that I was straight, and you have the audacity to ask me if I married a man?”*

Tubbo rolled his eyes, slipping a golden band off one of his horns and fiddling with it. “You can still get married to someone without wanting to have sex with them, idiot” he said, in that very matter-of-fact way that always accompanied a Tubbo Moment.

Tommy burst out laughing so hard he started to cough, while Sean’s ears and cheeks burned a bright red. He was trying to hide his smile behind his hands.

“What? I’m being serious!”

“I know, I know, it’s just the way you said it. God, Tubbo.”

Tubbo put his wedding band back on. “My point still stands. It’s what Ranboo and I did.”

“So you aren’t in love with Ranboo?” Tommy asked.

Tubbo frowned. "I... I know I love him. And I know he loves me, and we both love Michael. Other than that? We've established I'm not great at understanding my feelings."

"Does he make you happy?"

"Yeah, he does."

Tommy shrugged. *"Then there's not much more to it, innit?"*

"Have you two seriously not considered it, though? I mean you've got a kid and everything," Tubbo said, now addressing Sean.

"Uhh," Sean started, eyes flicking between Tubbo and Tommy. He seemed a bit nervous at suddenly being included in the conversation. "I think my Irish-Catholic grandmother might have a fit if she heard I got married to a guy, even if it wasn't romantic."

"Tommy," Tubbo said, "you've married a pussy."

Tommy sighed. *"I haven't... yeah, okay Tubbo."*

They were interrupted by a sudden shout from across the lawn. Phil and Techno, now dripping with the water, were cheering underneath a tree. On top of the tree sat Ranboo, dry as a bone, thankfully, but surrounded by rapidly disappearing particles.

"I did it!" he shouted, pumping his arms in the air.

Phil stopped cheering. "Mate, how are you gonna get down?"

Tubbo groaned, "Oh my god, I swear he's worse than Michael sometimes."

They all stood to start Operation: Save Ranboo From Himself, but before Tommy could even take a step, he heard a familiar *vrwoop* and Ranboo was right next to him.

Clementine shrieked with joy, just a few meters away. “Ears! Ears!” she called, climbing on to two feet and racing towards them.

“Ears?” Ranboo asked, very confused.

Tommy snorted. *“I think that’s her nickname for you.”*

Clementine latched onto his leg, grasping his pants like she was about to start climbing up.

“Woah, woah, Clem,” Sean pulled her away, “use your words please.”

“Up! Up! Up!”

Sean deposited the very wriggly child into Ranboo’s arms. “Sorry, she’s normally a bit more articulate, but I think she’s too excited.”

Ranboo laughed, holding onto Clementine’s waist as she attempted to grab the last few purple sprites floating in the air. “It’s alright. Michael is worse, and we only just got him to start speaking English. We didn’t even know he could speak until Techno asked us why he kept mentioning a “Horn Father.” I hadn’t told Techno that Tubbo and I were married, much less had a kid together.”

“That was an interesting conversation,” Tubbo said.

Techno laughed, approaching the group with Phil by his side. “You looked like someone drained the blood out of your face when I asked why I hadn’t been invited to the wedding.”

“That’s why we didn’t tell you,” Phil said, elbowing Techno in the ribs.

“I want the bees!” Clementine whined, smushing her face into Ranboo’s chest.

Ranboo looked nervous. “Are there bees in my chest too?”

“She uses some weird words for things because she can’t see, you just have to ask her to clarify,” Sean said, “Clementine, what bees do you want?”

“Ear’s bees! His heart sings and then he makes the bees!”

Tommy snapped his fingers. *“She means the particles, they must hum a lot like bees. I think she wants you to teleport again.”*

“Oh! Okay Clementine, I’ll make the bees.” Ranboo smiled, and before Tommy even realized what he was doing, they were gone.

Holy shit.

Ranboo was standing by the front door, holding Clementine in the air like Simba so she could play with the particles. When they touched her, the sprites fizzled out like sparks of electricity, dripping off her fingers into oblivion.

“Uh, Boo?” Tubbo called.

“Yeah?”

“You just teleported with Clementine.”

Ranboo just smiled, distracted by Clementine swatting the particles.

“Ranboo, you’ve just discovered you can teleport other people across very long distances almost instantly, now might be time to pay attention,” Techno drawled.

“Wait what?”

Tommy cracked up just seeing the lost expression on Ranboo’s face.

Phil sighed, “How he survived on his own for so long, I have no idea.” He started towards the front porch.

“Do you have somewhere I could dry off?” Techno asked. Water kept dripping off his hair and onto his face.

“There should be towels inside.”

Techno headed into the house, passing by an exasperated and very confused Ranboo.

Tommy sighed, forcing the last bits of tension out of his shoulders. He never expected to see any of the others again, but as far as reunions went, that wasn’t as bad as he would’ve expected.

The sun was starting to set, casting the roofs of the village houses in a golden light. The air was calm, only interrupted by Ranboo’s occasional *vrwoop* s and Clementine’s following giggles.

Tommy slipped his hand into Sean's. He needed something to ground him, something to help him know this was real, and he wasn't going to wake up in a few moments. Sean squeezed his hand but said nothing, just held onto Tommy.

Tommy breathed out.

Tubbo was looking at him, an array of expressions on his face, none of them that Tommy could interpret.

"I'm sorry," Tubbo said.

And Tommy knew exactly what he meant. It wasn't just an apology for exile, or for shoving Tommy into a wall, or whatever else. It was an apology for everything all at once, every transgression and trial they went through together, and especially for the ones they went through separate. It wasn't a new start, just a better one, built on top of years of friendship like houses on stilts above a water-logged crater.

Tommy cleared his throat, wanting to speak with his own voice so Tubbo could know it was true, understand that it was okay, that Tommy really did—

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

His stomach dropped.

Without any words between them, Tommy, Tubbo, and Sean ran to the center of the village, the others not far behind.

The square was empty except for one.

A man in a green jacket and white mask stood by the fountain, hand still wrapped around the bell's clapper. The moon was just starting to rise, a sliver of white behind the man's head

almost like a halo.

Dream looked Tommy up and down, mask tilting slightly with his head.

“Well, this is a surprise.”

Tommy focused on his breathing. In and out. Sean was to his left, Ranboo to his right with Clementine in his arms. Tubbo was in front of them both. Everything was fine.

“Funny seeing you ‘round here, Dream,” Techno drawled, “last I heard, you left the SMP with your tail between your legs.”

Tommy could see Sean stiffen at the name. He had forgotten that they’d never met, and now Sean was facing the man in Tommy’s nightmares.

Dream shrugged. “I had to retreat— bide my time, look for an opportunity.” The mask faced Tommy, two black dots boring through his skull. “I think I found it.”

Tommy ached to curl a finger around Sean’s belt, brush shoulders, *anything*, just to feel a little more grounded, but he knew Dream was watching. He never stopped. *Attachments*. They were Dream’s specialty, and he loved to use them. Loved to use Tommy’s. So he kept his hands on his sword and eyes forward.

“Dream, if you have no business in this village, I suggest you leave,” Tommy said. His voice was steady.

Dream took a moment to gaze at the buildings around them. “Aren’t you excited to see me, Tommy? I thought you’d miss your best friend.”

Tommy grit his teeth. “Have you been watching this whole time, then, just waiting to show your ugly fucking face?”

“No, actually. You did a good job of covering your tracks. By the time I noticed you left, there were barely any traces left, and I lost you in the Nether.”

Ender, his first Nether trip. That had been a fucking disaster. Tommy almost died and had his first panic attack, and yet that had been what saved his life. He could feel phantom heat on his chest.

“Actually,” Dream started, “I was just following Techno and Phil, you know, the whole ‘keep your enemies closer’, and they led me right to you! I’ll have to give them my thanks later, I would *hate* to owe Techno something.” His voice was coated in a sickly-sweet flavor, just like the wither roses Phil loved to use for decoration.

Techno tensed at whatever hidden barb Dream had thrown at him, but Tommy didn’t have the time nor the patience to unpack all that. He had to keep cool, focus on the conversation. If he slipped, Dream’s words would drag him down like river rapids on a rainy day.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Yeah, yeah, you guys can go have your villain sleepovers and poke sticks at each other later. Are you leaving or not?”

“That’s no way to talk to an old friend.”

“Oh fuck off, Dream. You said it yourself, you lost me. I’ve had years to get you out of my head, and I’ve done it. I’m not just gonna follow you back to the SMP, so you might as well leave and never come back, thank you.”

There was silence for a moment. Tommy noticed Techno’s fingers tighten and relax around the hilt of his sword.

“I may have let you go—” *let me go?* “—but it’s your fault for forgetting the rules. I’m sure you wouldn’t think the same if this village hadn’t let you think you actually mattered. I thought you hated pity?”

Sean stepped forward— just slightly, but enough to draw attention to him. He pulled his bow off his shoulder and strung an arrow. “It’s not pity, you absolute piece of *filth* . Just because no one cares about you doesn’t mean you have to project your insecurities onto Tommy.”

Tommy appreciated the gesture, he really did, and he would have time to cry over those words later, hopefully, but Sean had just put a target on his heart. Tommy tugged Sean back by his wrist and did what he did best— made sure all attention was on him.

“He’s right. I don’t see Sapnap and George around, and I thought you and Techno were friends, but last I heard he kicked your ass out of town. Are you just jealous that they have people that love them because you’ll never be able to say that once they take a good look at that thing you like to call a face?”

Well. Tommy may have laid it on a bit thick. Oops.

Dream’s sword materialized in his hand, and Tommy’s heart dropped.

“You should control your pets, Tommy, we wouldn’t want something unfortunate to happen,” Dream said.

Tommy’s eyes skated across the group next to them. Ranboo was the only one without a weapon in his hand, choosing instead to carry Clementine with one and hold his shield with the other. Tubbo had out a glistening axe, held tightly by his shoulder. Beside them, Techno and Phil held their sword and bow respectively.

This wasn’t going to end peacefully. Dream was obviously here to fight, and as much as Tommy would’ve liked to rely on the others, he knew there was a reason Dream chose here to fight. He had something up his sleeve, some trick, and Tommy needed to be prepared to stand alone.

No attachments.

Sean wouldn't run, even if Tommy begged him to. He would have to figure out a way to get him out of the fight before it escalated, but there wasn't enough time. Tommy would deal with it later.

"Ranboo," Tommy whispered, "take her as far as you can, okay?"

He snuck one last look at Clementine. She was curled into Ranboo, happy to just listen to his heart and pearl beat. She'd be okay.

"Tommy, wh—?"

"Go!" Tommy shouted, tensing and lifting his sword as Dream took a leap forward.

Ranboo must have understood, because Tommy heard a sharp intake of breath next to him.

The next second felt like an eternity.

Tommy saw the first bursts of purple particles appear around them, eerily similar to the same surrounding Nether portals. Behind them, Dream was speeding up, axe raised. Right before the telltale *vrwoop*, Tommy noticed four things. First Tommy's hand was still around Sean's wrist, just a sliver of contact. Second, Clementine had heard Tommy's shout, and she was turned in Ranboo's arms, reaching her little fingers to clutch onto Tommy's shirt. Third, Phil had his wings outstretched and wrapped around Ranboo, Tubbo, and Technoblade like a protective blanket. Fourth, Tubbo stepped forward out of Phil's reach to block Dream's first swing.

Then, the world swirled around him, purple mixing into his vision until it turned black. Before Tommy could panic, everything righted itself, and the world looked normal again.

But instead of wooden houses and blue sky in front of him, Tommy was looking at blackstone walls and dark oak floors. His left foot was standing in a pool of water, just one block large, and an odd table stood in front of him, pale yellow and teal. There was a wither rose in a pot in the middle.

Tommy snapped his head up, pulling his foot out of the water and spinning around. Ranboo was beside him, kneeling in the water and clutching his head, but still holding Clementine. Beside him, Phil and Technoblade were looking around, apparently just as surprised as Tommy. Sean was on his ass, sprawled across a wooden chair.

“Where the *fuck* are we?” Tommy said, failing to keep the panic out of his voice.

Phil was crouched by Ranboo, whispering something in one ear while covering the other. Clementine climbed out of his arms and tugged on Tommy’s leg.

“Daddy, what happened?” Clementine asked. Tommy wished he could answer.

Techno had an odd look on his face, but whatever he was thinking, he wasn’t saying it. Sean looked like he couldn’t quite believe he wasn’t dreaming.

Tommy grabbed Clementine and ran out of the room. Just a few strides down the hall were two columns of water, an obvious water elevator. Tommy pinched Clementine’s nose and jumped in the bubbling side.

They popped out onto the ground, landing in freezing cold snow. Tommy’s knees almost buckled, but he stumbled instead, keeping his grip on Clementine.

The world around them was covered in snow, terrain unlike anything Tommy had seen near the village. In fact, it almost reminded him of...

No.

A Nether portal sat atop the next hill over, netherrack creeping out from the obsidian after being used over and over. Just over the horizon, Tommy could spot a few beacons, heralding something much more sinister than it looked.

He'd only been here once, just to snoop around and steal from Technoblade while Dream was gone. In and out, not bothering to gaze at the pristine rolling hills of snow and cozy wooden cabins. Still, it wasn't hard to realize where he was.

The SMP looked the same as it did the day he left.

The water splashed behind Tommy. Sean, Phil, Techno, and Ranboo stumbled out from the elevator. Ranboo still looked dazed, holding onto Phil by his arm, but he was conscious, which meant Tommy was about to rip into him.

He'd been gone for years, he'd gotten better, all to just get dragged back to this shithole.

Tommy waited for Tubbo to come up behind them, knowing he'd need both Sean and him beside him once his mind caught up with his body. Sean stumbled to his side. Tommy waited a beat longer.

He thought back to the odd room in the ground room below. Sean, Ranboo, Techno, and Phil all in disarray.

Wait.

“Where's Tubbo?”

Chapter End Notes

IM BACK BITCHES!!!!!!!!!!

Yall were getting too comfy with happy chapters i had to do it to em. I've had the stasis chamber idea for so long now..... >:)

Thanks for all your help with the last "chapter" (holy shit my inbox tho) it really helped me sort out my thoughts and figure out what I wanted. I probably won't elaborate a ton on my decision jsut cause I want to keep some suspense for yall, but I will say the QPR tag is staying. :) I want you to know I read every single comment (yes I saw that one where you said it would be lost... i see everything) and I probably read them all at least five times over. I even categorized them in a table because I am a nerd and data is helpful! :D Also, just another thank you to the reader who originally contacted me, I think Sean and Tommy's relationship will be much better written now lol. I've still yet to go back and edit cause I wanted to get yall some content in this drought, but that's my next goal.

You probably noticed on the last real chapter that I didn't respond to every comment. If you've checked before, I've made it my goal to say something to everyone that stops by and takes the time to comment. However, with the size this fic has gotten to, thats sorta not possible anymore. I will still read literally every comment. Trust me. I read them all the time. I read your bookmark notes, I look at sub count stuff, I look at everything. You all are more valuable than you know <3 So even if I don't respond, I still appreciate your support

This chapter was brought to you by the new Imagine Dragons album, Mercury pt 1 and Lil Nas X's album, Montero. Both are bangers, go listen.

NONEXISTANTARTIST DID SOME AMAZING FANART OF OUR BELOVED CLEM, GO CHECK IT OUT AND DROP A LIKE:

https://www.instagram.com/p/CTg2dDNpv6a/?utm_medium=copy_link

And Impravidus wrote the fluffiest oneshot to ever fluff about Clem, Sean, and Tommy. It should be linked below in the Works Inspired By section. Please read it. I cried of happiness.

teeth

Chapter Summary

teeth - while baring one's teeth, simply point to them or trace a horizontal line in the air in front of them

-

Tommy knelt by Ranboo, Clementine tucked into his side, and held his head up by his chin. "Ranboo, can you hear me? You need to take us back. You left Tubbo with Dream, and we're all the way in the SMP. We need to go back, I've got to go back. Ranboo? Ranboo! Take me back!"

Chapter Notes

don't mind me just crawling out of my hole to give yall this

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"Where's Tubbo?"

It took a second for the words to register in Ranboo's befuddled mind, but once they did, the panic was clear on his face.

"Tubbo?" he murmured. Ranboo's head was whipping back and forth as fast as it would let him, which wasn't very fast, considering he looked one second away from passing out.

Tommy knelt by Ranboo, Clementine tucked into his side, and held his head up by his chin. "Ranboo, can you hear me? You need to take us back. You left Tubbo with Dream, and we're all the way in the SMP. We need to go back, I've got to go back. Ranboo? Ranboo! Take me back!"

Sean grabbed Tommy by the elbow and tried to pull him up. "Tommy, I think—"

“Ranboo, wake the fuck up! That’s my home! You took me from my home, and you left Tubbo, and I’m back *here* , you’ve got to undo it, please, take me back, Ranboo, please, Dream’s there, we have to...”

Tommy trailed off, the words getting stuck in his throat, and dropped his head. He swallowed a building sob.

“Please.”

The tundra was eerily silent.

Well, it was until the portal nearby activated, and out stepped someone that Tommy technically recognized, but every detail that he used to remember was different.

Niki’s hair was no longer blonde, instead a jet black with hot pink tips. She was decked in enchanted netherite from head to toe, including an axe held in steady hands. Potions of all kinds were strung along her belt.

The strangest change, however, was less visible to someone that didn’t know her. She carried herself with confidence, looking more comfortable in armor than she ever did behind the counter at her bakery.

Tommy had fought at Niki’s side countless times, and through multiple wars, and he had never seen her so battle-ready.

“Techno!” Niki called, rushing over to them, “I got the signal you were back but I didn’t activate the stasis chambers, I’m not sure—”

She paused, apparently noticing the extra people. Tommy saw the grip on her axe tighten out of the corner of his eye.

“Niki!” Phil called, “we brought, uh, guests.”

Techno snorted.

Niki stayed silent, eyes roaming over the group. They caught on Clementine for a beat too long, and Tommy tightened his grip. Thankfully, Clementine was being shy and burying her head in Tommy’s chest.

Then she locked onto Tommy, and her whole demeanor changed.

“Tommy?”

He smiled, tight-lipped and tense, and stood up. Sean shuffled closer, just enough to press his shoulder against Tommy’s.

Niki simply cocked her head and looked him up and down. Tommy was honestly surprised by her reaction; they’d been close before he was exiled, and he was supposed to be dead, right? She didn’t exactly look happy to see him. Had he somehow pissed her off just like everyone else before he left?

“Did you steal a child?” she asked.

Tommy frowned. “Why does everyone keep thinking I stole a kid?”

“Because it sounds exactly like something you’d do.”

“Shut the fuck up, Technoblade.”

Niki crossed her arms, radiating a hostility Tommy had never seen, at least not directed towards him.

“So?”

It took Tommy a moment to remember what she was asking, a little hung up on the fact that multiple thought he would commit grand theft infant.

“Oh,” Tommy said, “this is Clementine. She’s— uh, she’s mine.”

Sean waved a hand. “And mine!”

“And his.”

“My name is Sean, it’s nice to meet you!”

Tommy couldn’t help but smile. Ender, he swore Sean was the human embodiment of a golden retriever sometimes. Even though Sean had only a year or so on Tommy, he felt ages older.

“Niki,” Techno said, “I’ve just sent a message out to everyone on the server to meet at the community house. Could you grab the stragglers?”

She glanced at her communicator, and her face darkened. “What about Las Nevadas?”

“We’ll need everyone. Hopefully Quackity’s hatred for Dream outweighs his hatred for me.”

Okay, well Tommy had obviously missed a lot. Hopefully someone would be willing to update him on everything that’d happened while he was gone.

Wait. It didn't matter what went on in the SMP. He didn't care.

He wasn't getting dragged back into this fucking mess.

Tommy glanced down at Ranboo who was currently a murmuring mess at Phil's feet, shivering every now and then to send a fresh layer of purple sprites cascading to the ground.

"I don't think Ranboo is able to take us back home right now, is he?" Tommy muttered.

Phil shot him a look. "I don't think endermen are meant to travel that far. His body must have confused his pearl in the stasis chamber with his biological one, especially with the stress of teleporting multiple people."

"How did that even happen?" Sean asked, "Did we accidentally make a chain of people?"

"Essentially," Phil shrugged, "whatever happened, it was enough to take us but leave Tubbo."

At Tubbo's name, Ranboo stirred with a groan of pain. Phil pulled out a potion of regeneration and tipped it into his mouth. It didn't seem to do much, just bringing a bit of color back into Ranboo's face.

"I'm going to take Ranboo back to his house to rest, I'll meet you all there when I can, okay?" Phil said, already pulling Ranboo into his arms. With an audible snap and clang of metal, Phil's wings extended from beneath his cloak.

Tommy's jaw dropped.

The last he'd seen Phil, his wings were covered in a layer of ash, burnt, and mangled to the point that even Tommy knew he wouldn't be able to fly for a long time. Now, they were a

shiny black, and they glistened an iridescent lilac when the light hit the feathers, just like the crows that followed Phil. Tommy barely noticed that, however, he was too busy staring at the beautiful metal framework that covered most of his wings.

And then Phil turned, and Tommy could see his left wing better— oh god.

Tommy could see the horrible scars twisting their way under the metal, and he could see where they stopped. Where everything underneath stopped. Because there was no wing.

About halfway down where his secondaries would have been, Phil's left wing had been amputated.

To replace the missing wing, someone had made a prosthetic. It was a combination of iron and leather, each piece carefully crafted to fit Phil's anatomy— or what was left of it. The metal shone with his feathers, and little engravings caught Tommy's eyes, too far away to see properly. They were gorgeous. Tommy felt sick to his stomach.

Phil took off with a powerful wing beat, and in seconds he was headed towards the beacons in the distance.

"His wings..." Tommy trailed off.

Techno gave him a withering look. "Dream's not the boss anymore, Phil can fly if he wants."

"That's not— nevermind." Tommy shook his head. It wasn't worth it to explain when *he* couldn't even understand why the sight of Phil's injuries made him feel like throwing up.

"Let's get moving," Niki said, "we're probably the farthest away, even by Nether travel."

Tommy started to follow her before he registered the words. He stopped.

“I’m not taking my daughter through the Nether, pathway or not!”

Niki paused. “You could take a boat.”

Sean stepped up beside him. “I can just stay here with Clementine, or go find Phil, if you’d like.”

Tommy could tell he was trying to be helpful, take some of the pressure off Tommy’s shoulders, but it wasn’t helping. The last thing he wanted was to have Sean out of his sight.

“No, no, we aren’t going to the community house at all,” Tommy said, “we’re going to get as far away from the SMP as possible, first. We’ll lay low for a bit, stay in some villages, whatever we need to do.” Tommy started rummaging through his pockets. “I’ve got some money and water, we can find food, if we make our path as unexpected as possible, we can lose Dream, maybe if—”

“Tommy.”

“—fire resistance, I can make a fake trail in the Nether. I don’t think we can go back to the village, if we really need supplies I can go alone, but I don’t want to risk that unless we really need to. It’s all snow to the north, so we’ll head west—”

“Tommy.”

“—hope we don’t run into anyone. I’m pretty sure everyone here still hates me, so we’ll have to assume they’re on Dream’s side, which sucks, considering—”

“Tommy!”

Sean grabbed Tommy's hands and forced him to look up. Niki and Techno were standing nearby, just... staring at Tommy.

"Tommy, we can't just leave Tubbo," Sean said, his voice calm and soothing, "I get the feeling they're gonna need your help to fight Dream."

Tommy shivered, paused, then shook himself. "I'm sorry about Tubbo, but me staying isn't going to help anyone. My priority is you and Clementine, and as much as I missed Tubbo, and can't put his safety over yours. Come on, we need to go." He tried pulling Sean by the arm, but Sean stood his ground.

"Tommy, this is your best friend. I'm not letting you abandon him because there's a *chance* I could get hurt."

Tommy grit his teeth. "It's not just a chance, Sean, Dream is— he uses people, okay? He takes the things people love and turns them into a bargaining chip or a weapon, and you're my biggest attachment. Tubbo was, or is, I don't know, he's been my best friend, but you—"

He cut off. How was he supposed to put their relationship into words? Sean was, he was just Tommy's *person*. The person he went to when the nightmares got bad, or when Clementine discovered a new way to use her vibrations, or when he found a carrot shaped exactly like a dick, or just when he was lonely and wanted someone around. Sean was the one person he could depend on no matter what. He was more than a best friend, and even that didn't feel right, like they were travelling the path between friend and best friend and instead of moving forward they turned left and ended up in this nameless territory. And it wasn't romantic— Ender, no— but Tommy didn't mind the thought of spending the rest of his life with Sean in the little house with the spruce door and teal plants. Tommy knew all this, and he knew he loved Sean, but he just didn't know how to tell him.

Sean pulled Clementine out of his arms, carefully shifting her so she could clutch to his shirt.

"It's okay, I understand," Sean said, and Tommy was relieved, but Sean didn't look happy. There was something wrong. Tommy almost said something, but Sean had already turned around.

“Where would I find Phil and Ranboo?” Sean asked Techno.

Techno jerked his thumb towards the beacon. “There’s three houses just a bit that way. They should be in one of them.”

Sean nodded in thanks and walked away.

Tommy was frozen, slightly in shock, but mostly because he couldn’t make his mind up on who to follow. His instincts were screaming to run, his head was telling him to go after Sean, but his heart ached to finish his conversation with Tubbo. To forgive him.

“Are you coming or not?” Techno asked.

Tommy steeled himself, tried to bring back just a sliver of the part of him that died years ago.

“Sure,” he said, “what the hell.”

Niki ushered them through the portal, but quickly let Techno take the lead so she could keep her eyes on her communicator. There were messages flashing across the screen, but Tommy could barely look away from the path to read them. He hadn’t invested in fire protection for his armor, and he wasn’t interested in taking a fiery bath. Not today.

Eventually they arrived at a hub that Tommy didn’t recognize, but assumed connected to the main portal in the overworld, judging by its size.

Techno stepped through first, then Tommy.

He had to blink his eyes a few times to adjust to the light, but soon enough, the familiar skyline of the Greater SMP filled his view. It felt like he had time travelled, but to a timeline just slightly off of his own. It was the SMP, of course, but there were so many little things that were off that Tommy felt on edge.

New buildings had cropped up along the Prime path, standing on what used to be bare ground or the place of an old build. There were scorch marks across the ground in an odd pattern, like someone had drawn long, winding lines across the grass and stone in fire. The community house—

Oh.

The community house had been raised to the ground. Or to the water? Tommy wasn't sure. The floor of crafting tables remained, but they all looked too new to be the originals. Everything else was gone, save a few chests scattered aimlessly about.

There was a crowd of people gathered. Most were hanging around in little groups on the paths leading into the community house. Very few were actually standing in the real thing, and most of them were arguing.

As they approached, Tommy realized it was Quackity, Puffy, and Jack Manifold in the middle of most of the fighting, surprisingly.

“—gonna trust Techno, who, may I remind you all, *killed me!*”

“You aren't special, Quackity, he killed me too, but you don't see me throwing a fit.”

“Whatever the Syndicate needs us for, I'm sure it has good intentions, and if it doesn't, we fight together, alright? There's no point in—”

“No point? Are you people crazy? We should be looking for Dream, and last I saw that green piece of shit he was standing shoulder to shoulder with Techno and Phil.”

“Don’t be an idiot, you know what happened with the prison, besides, the message said it had something to do with Dream, so we wait here.”

“And we’re supposed to listen to you, why? I heard—”

Niki cut them off with a piercing whistle. They stopped just a few steps above the community house so that they were looking down on the others. Tommy itched to sneak away.

“We’ve got news about Dream, and uh, a development,” she said, and turned to look at Tommy.

Oh. She wanted him to speak.

Tommy opened his mouth.

And then closed it. And then opened it again. And closed it again.

Shit. Sean wasn’t here to translate, he couldn’t think of anyone that knew sign language, and there was no way Tommy was going to summarize the shitshow that was that day in a fucking book. His hand would fall off first.

Tommy could feel every bit of his body vibrating in anxiety.

So, he ran.

Well, he didn’t run, per say. He simply turned around and walked away very, very quickly without explanation.

“Wait, Tommy! Wait!” Techno called.

“Did he just say Tommy?”

“Who is that guy?”

Tommy kept moving forward, flexing and relaxing his fingers as he walked. Where could he hide? His house? L’manburg? He didn’t even know where he was going anymore, the landscape too different from what his muscle memory knew.

“Tommy!”

Techno appeared in front of him. He must have used a pearl, the cheating bastard. Tommy simply pivoted and slipped past him.

“Just stop for a second, jeez!”

Techno pulled out his sword, and, looking back, he was probably going to use it to push Tommy back or bar him from going further, but Tommy’s instincts kicked in. There was a threat, and he needed to get rid of it. Simple.

Techno’s stance wasn’t anything close to his usual fighting form, so Tommy had an easy opening. He rushed in, low and on his feet. Before Techno caught on, Tommy kicked his right ankle from the inside so it buckled. At the same time, he whirled around so his back was to Techno’s chest. As Techno lost his balance momentarily, Tommy grabbed his wrist and dug into the spots he knew hurt like a bitch. The second Tommy saw Techno’s fingers open, he was already sprinting away.

Unfortunately, in his panic, Tommy forgot about the others. This proved to be a mistake when Niki pulled him into a headlock with her sword pressed tight against his neck.

Time seemed to pause. Techno was looking at him in surprise while clutching his injured wrist. He didn't seem to be interested in going for the sword on the ground.

The rest of the SMP members caught up and saw the aftermath of Tommy's failed escape.

Niki's grip tightened.

Fucking *fuck* there was a sword to his neck.

Tommy *screamed*.

He thrashed around like a drowning cat, losing all semblance of precision. The only thought in his mind was panic. Tommy bit down on the hand in front of him, yanking his head backwards in an attempt to rip something.

Whoever was holding him screamed but kept their grip, and whatever control Tommy had left over his actions disappeared in a flash.

He was ripping his throat raw and bruising every inch of his skin, but Tommy couldn't feel the pain. He couldn't feel anything. Kicking and punching and biting and scratching, it was all he could do.

And then the arms released him.

Tommy dropped to the ground and scrambled to put his back to something that wasn't a person's chest. His ribs slammed into stone. Good.

Panting, Tommy tried to take stock of his surroundings. Niki had grabbed him, he remembered that much, and Techno was there... and, and the others—

Shit. *Shit shit shit fucking shit.*

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut and forced them open.

There was a very large crowd of people surrounding him and looking very concerned. Niki's hand was bleeding. Her sword was gone. Techno was crouched down to Tommy's level.

"If anyone tries to touch me again I won't hesitate to bite them too," Tommy signed.

Techno frowned. "I still don't know what you're saying."

Tommy gave him the finger.

"Uh, is anyone going to explain why you've brought a feral person with you and why he apparently can't talk? And also how he just knocked a sword out of Technoblade's hand?" Jack asked.

"He can talk," Techno said, "he just, doesn't sometimes."

"It's called trauma, bitch. Want me to give you a firsthand experience?" Tommy spit out the blood that had started pooling in his mouth. He grinned.

"Oh my Ender, I think he's a cannibal," someone muttered.

Niki stepped forward, her arms crossed. "Tommy, we need you to talk so everyone can hear what happened with Dream."

When did Niki become an asshole?

“Abso-fucking-lutely not.”

Captain Puffy spoke up, “I’m sorry, did you say Tommy? Like Tommyinnit, Tommy?”

When Tommy didn’t move or speak, Techno sighed. “The one and only.”

“Tommy? I thought he was dead?”

“Is he with Dream? Do we need to kill him?”

“Didn’t he kill himself?”

“He’s got that grave by the bench and everything.”

“Tommy’s alive?!”

Niki whistled again, and everyone shut up.

“If everyone could please calm down for a second, all your questions will be answered in a moment. Tommy,” she said, addressing him, “are you going to speak?”

Tommy gave her the finger too.

Ender, he felt like the past three years just didn’t happen. He was a scared kid again, helpless at the feet of his enemies. Why did he even bother running in the first place if it all led back to this?

Techno huffed and turned his back towards Tommy, instead facing the crowd.

“Tommy is alive,” Techno gestured to him. Tommy bared his teeth again. “We found him in a village while looking for Dream. Turns out Dream was just following us the whole time and confronted us when he realized Tommy was there. Ranboo recently discovered he could teleport and used that to get us out, unfortunately, Tubbo was left behind by accident. Phil is helping Ranboo recover from teleportation fatigue. We think Dream is on his way here, considering he seemed interested in getting to Tommy. So, we need to prepare to take him down and get Tubbo back. Any questions?”

“You expect us to believe that you *accidentally* left Tubbo behind, and Ranboo conveniently isn’t here to say otherwise?” Puffy scoffed, “The Syndicate has been looking for a way to get rid of Snowchester for years.”

“The Syndicate cleared Tubbo and Snowchester a long time ago,” Niki said.

Puffy frowned. “Like you all had any authority to—”

Tommy cut her off by clapping as loudly as he could. They all turned to look at him again. He rose to shaky feet, using the stone wall to support his weight until his balance kicked back in, and pulled his netherite sword out of his inventory, finally having the piece of mind to remember it was there.

He pointed the tip of the sword at the ground. With just a bit of pressure, the netherite cut through the stone. Tommy drew a crude smiley face, a symbol that everyone on the server could recognize.

Tommy paused, making sure everyone was paying attention to him.

Then he slashed his sword through the smile. It was a clear message. He gave everyone a thumbs up and licked the blood off the front of his teeth.

Quackity clapped his hands. “Well, I feel like that speaks for itself! Who’s ready to murder a teletubby?”

Chapter End Notes

mmmmm there's just something about cliffhangers :)

Sorry for the absence, life just sorta happened. I'm a full time college student, and midterms were a thing, and I have no free time cause of marching band, and I just wasn't really in the mood to write. I always say that writer's block isn't a thing and you can always force yourself to write, but I'm doing this as a hobby, so I want to have fun when i write lol. I've also taken a lot of steps in planning a new story, but I've promised myself to finish this before starting anything else.

There's been a lot in my life lately, btw. I got a girlfriend!!!! I passed all my midterms and even got a 100 on my physics test. I visited my sister's new apartment in DC. I (finally) got a corset which I've been wanting for a while. Pebblebrain!!! Mojang also dropped some new info about the Warden, and if you wanna hear my thoughts on that, check out my twitter. I promise im not scary, and I'll probably follow you back :)

See yall in a bit <3

FANART PLEASE GO GIVE THEM LOTS OF LOVE EVERYTHING YOU ALL MAKE IS BEAUTIFUL AND I TREASURE IT WITH MY WHOLE HEART

[Little baby Clem with her little baby socks ahhhhhh](#) by nonexistentartist on insta <3

[Sean absolutely decking Techno by Orange.](#) I look at this every day.

[Very cute drawing of a slightly-older Clementine by fleur.](#) Look at her little dress!

[Raccoon drew our sweet little Clementine, check it out!](#)

history

Chapter Summary

history - both hands held horizontally over the right shoulder and circled around each other multiple time

-

Tommy's moment of peace didn't last very long.

As soon as everyone gathered back in the community house, arguments broke out again. Quackity seemed set on antagonizing Techno and Phil every chance he got, and then Niki would jump to their defense, and then Puffy would jump in— and there was some history between those two that Tommy couldn't figure out— and it just devolved into chaos again.

Chapter Notes

for those of yall that follow me on twitter, its not this chapter :) not yet...

also, look at the chapter count for a jumpscare

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy's moment of peace didn't last very long.

As soon as everyone gathered back in the community house, arguments broke out again. Quackity seemed set on antagonizing Techno and Phil every chance he got, and then Niki would jump to their defense, and then Puffy would jump in— and there was some history between those two that Tommy couldn't figure out— and it just devolved into chaos again.

Tommy sat on one of the chests, silent but tense.

Someone sat next to him, a hybrid of something that Tommy had never seen before. His skin was tinted green, eyes emerald, and dripping slime.

Wait, slime?

On second thought, maybe this guy wasn't even a hybrid. He looked as if someone had tried to copy what a human should look like, missed the mark just slightly, and landed solidly in the Uncanny Valley.

"Nice to meet you, Tommyinnit from Nowhere," he said, "I'm Slimecicle from Las Nevadas!"

Tommy gave him a little wave.

Slimecicle reached into his hair— or was that just his head?— and pulled out a pen. He handed it to Tommy, who took it with a tentative hand. It was also dripping slime.

"I don't normally carry paper on me, sorry," Slimecicle said, "it gets very mushy. But I've heard it's possible to write on human skin!"

Okay, yeah, definitely not human in any capacity.

Tommy wiped off the goo on the pen and pressed it against his arm. Surprisingly, it was just a simple ballpoint.

Las Nevadas?

"Oh yes!" Slimecicle grinned. "It's where I put my body when there's no one to listen to! Quackity from Las Nevadas built it— he's very nice, offered not to kill me and everything!"

Tommy took a second to parse actually useful information from whatever Slimecicle just said.

Who else?

“Well there’s Awesamdude from the Prison, Foolish from Snowchester, Fundy from L’manburg, Tubbo from Snowchester, and Purpled from Nowhere. But I haven’t seen Purple in a few days— or is it months?— and Quackity gets mad when I mention him, so don’t tell him I told you.”

Slimecicle held a finger up to his lips, but the smile stayed plastered to his face. When he pulled his hand away, strings of slime fell and broke like his face had started to absorb his fingers.

Tommy nodded, because what else was he supposed to do?

“Awesome! Dap me up!”

Tommy had no clue what the fuck was going on.

“Dap me u—”

“Ah, Tommy, I see you’ve met Slimecicle!” Quackity said, throwing his arm around Slimecicle’s shoulder. “Hey, Slime, Tommy looks a bit busy—” Quackity winked at Tommy “—and I found a nice, dark hole nearby that I think you would love. Why don’t we…” His voice faded as he led Slimecicle out of the community house.

Tommy felt a bit like someone had whacked him on the head.

The argument had died down a bit, but it seemed like quite a few people had walked away. In fact, where was everyone? Niki had said she called everyone, but Tommy could only spot five or six people. And on top of that, he knew all of them. He’d been gone for years, surely Foolish and Slimecicle weren’t the only newcomers, right?

“Tommy?”

Niki was standing in front of him. Her sword wasn't anywhere in few, but Tommy still bristled at the sight of her armor.

She took a seat next to him, ignoring the layer of sticky goo that Slimecicle had left.

“I need to know everything about your encounter with Dream, so if you could start talking, that'd be great.” Her tone was drier than a desert.

Tommy scowled. *I'm not choosing to be silent.*

Niki frowned at that. “What do you mean? Techno said you spoke earlier, so it's not an injury, right?”

It's not physical, it's mental.

Niki's face went through a series of complicated emotions as she read the message scrawled on Tommy's arm. It didn't help that the ink emphasized his scars.

“Like, PTSD mental?”

Tommy nodded.

“I'm—” Niki looked away, “I'm sorry, I didn't know.”

I noticed.

“Is your neck alright? I have a regen potion if you’d like?”

Tommy thought of sickly sweet potion pouring over him and shivered. Besides, Niki didn’t even draw blood. It wouldn’t join his collection of scars even if it felt like someone had ripped a scab off his brain and let old wounds ooze.

Niki fiddled with her hands. “Can I get you a book? Your arm is looking a bit full there.”

Tommy shrugged.

She pulled a book out of her inventory. It looked well worn, a soft red leather cover and slightly yellowed pages. Niki flipped to a blank page and held it out to Tommy.

“I’d like it back eventually, but you can use it however much you need. It’s been a while since I’ve written in it anyway,” Niki said.

Where is everyone? Tommy wrote.

“Well,” Niki started, “Techno and Sam are currently pooling their arsenals together. I’m pretty sure Quackity just took Slimecicle back to Las Nevadas, he’s pretty protective of the guy, so Slime probably won’t fight with us. I think everyone else is nearby.”

What about Bad? Eret? Ponk? That Foolish dude?

Niki’s polite smile dropped. “I guess you weren’t there for that, were you? There uh, Bad and Skeppy found something underneath their mansion. It was a giant egg with red vines coming out of it. We called it the Crimson. It started spreading and taking over the server, including people.”

She paused, taking a second.

“It got bad. We couldn’t figure out how to destroy the Egg, just contain it. No one has seen Bad and Skeppy in years. Ant and Ponk don’t leave their house anymore, and Hannah just up and left. I don’t think they could handle the guilt.”

Guilt?

Niki sighed. “Bad and the rest held a festival. Normally the Syndicate— that’s Techno, Me, Phil, a couple others— would have kept an eye on it, but we were dealing with something else. I don’t remember exactly what happened, but I know a lot of people lost lives.”

Ah. Well, at least Tommy avoided that.

Tommy circled Eret’s name a few times.

“Eret left about a year after you. I think your death hit them really hard. She sends Foolish letters every month or so. Last I heard she had started a tailor’s shop somewhere and had a kid. I didn’t pry for details.”

Tommy nodded slowly, taking in everything. At least Eret had managed to live a happy life. Tommy had long forgiven her, she did everything in her power to make up for her mistake. They deserved something outside of this hellhole.

“And Foolish is on babysitting duty,” Niki added, “He’s not really a fighter anyway.”

What were you busy with?

“Hm?”

During the Egg, you said you were busy.

“Oh.” If Niki looked upset earlier, she looked downright murderous now. “There’s a lot leading up to that. What have you heard about?”

I know L’manburg is destroyed. Still haven’t quite processed that yet. And Tubbo mentioned something about trying to kill Technoblade. That’s about it.

“Just a few days after you died, the Butcher Army— that’s Tubbo, Quackity, Fundy, and Ranboo, though Ranboo wasn’t exactly a passionate participant— put Phil on house arrest and started looking for Techno. Eventually they found him, arrested him, and brought him to L’manburg for execution. He escaped with the help of Dream and took one of Quackity’s lives during the fight. In retaliation, Phil, Techno, and Dream blew up L’manburg, and properly this time. I, uh, I’d been angry at Wilbur for a while, and I burned down the Lmantree.”

“Phil offered Ranboo a place in the arctic with him and Techno since he felt bad about blowing up Ranboo’s house. I showed up a bit later. Dream was supposed to be our next member, but that didn’t exactly go to plan.”

“This whole time, Sam has been building a giant prison next to Bad and Skeppy’s old mansion. He was contracted by Dream. The construction was completed just a few months after your death. So Dream tells Techno that he owes him one for helping out with the Butcher Army and asks him to help guard the prison. Techno obliges, and Dream traps him inside.”

What kind of prison is this? I’m surprised Techno didn’t just punch the walls down.

Niki glowered. “You’ll see eventually. It’s huge. Bigger than L’manburg’s walls by a lot, and made entirely out of obsidian and blackstone. And there are elder guardians trapped underneath to give you mining fatigue. Basically, it’s inescapable.”

“Phil, Ranboo, and I start to try and break him out. But it turns out that Ranboo’s enderman side takes over sometimes and sleepwalks, almost? I still don’t quite understand how it

works, but Dream was able to control Ranboo. One night, Dream gets Punz to “accidentally” let Techno out while he makes Ranboo try and kill Phil. I guess the plan was for Techno to find Ranboo after he murdered Phil, or at least tried to, and then Techno would kill him, blah blah blah. It would’ve been a bloodbath, and the Syndicate would have been crippled.

“Unfortunately for him,” Niki gave Tommy a wicked grin, “Dream forgot about me. Techno called for my help the second he got out, and I managed to knock out Dream while he snuck around the commune like a fucking creep. We were about to kill him— permanently, that is, we did take one of his lives— but Punz managed to get him out with the help of Purpled. No one has seen either of them since.”

Tommy paused, pen hovering above the paper. There was a lot he could ask, but Niki gave a fairly straightforward explanation of everything he’d missed. Well, he hoped that was everything.

Ender, the server had been busy without him. It was easy to listen to Dream in exile, to believe him when he said that Tommy was the cause of everyone’s problems, but the evidence was damning— the SMP was fucked up with or without him.

But at the same time, it felt a bit disappointing. Tommy would’ve hoped his death was more... impactful.

What happened when I died?

“Well, you have a few graves. There’s one in Snowchester and at the place of your exile. Puffy built a shrine to Mellohi in the Holy Land.” Niki smiled, something sweet and warm like fresh bread. “There’s a portrait of you near L’manburg’s remains, right next to Will’s. There are statues all around your house. And Ranboo replaces the flowers by your door every week.”

“Tubbo didn’t leave his office for two days after breaking the news to everyone. I don’t know if he ever would’ve if the Butcher Army hadn’t formed. Quackity was heartbroken. Puffy cried when she told me, and I didn’t believe her at first. I used to blame you for everything we went through, for Wilbur, but... Well, hearing about your death just made me madder. It took a while for me to get over myself, but when I did, I made your favorite cookies, you

know the ones with too much butter that you like just slightly burnt, and I stuffed my face and cried.”

Niki laughed, rubbing her slightly-red eyes. “I’m sorry for how I reacted when I saw you. I was ready for a battle, and I think all those old feelings came back, I just... I’m sorry.”

You ate my fucking cookies without me?

Niki laughed, slightly wet and full of disbelief. “You’ve really grown up, haven’t you? I’m sorry about whatever happened to you, but I’m glad you got a chance to live. Some of us don’t deserve to leave, we’re too caught up in soaking in our own grief and pain, but you, you always had bigger dreams.”

Tommy was stunned. He wanted to focus on Niki’s apology, to sink into her compliments, but he couldn’t ignore her other words with good conscience.

If these past three years have taught me anything, it’s that everyone deserves a chance to be better.

“Even Dream?”

Tommy paused, considering her words.

I’m not sure. I want him to have that opportunity because I think he could be a good person if he tried, but I’m not sure if that’s just my hopeless optimism or the remnants of his manipulation.

Niki shrugged. “Who knows. I don’t think it’ll matter in the end, anyway. Techno’s been itching to kill Dream for years now, and Phil’s on the same page.”

What do you think?

“I think that hating people got me nowhere,” she looked at Tommy with a sad smile, “but I don’t think someone like Dream could ever make up for his actions.”

All of a sudden, Tommy could feel a growing itch under his skin. He instinctively looked around for Sean but stopped once he remembered.

“Could you show me L’manburg?” Tommy blurted.

Niki’s eyes widened in surprise. “Uh, sure!”

A second later, Puffy skidded to a halt in front of them, huffing and puffing.

“Tommy!” She pulled him into a tight hug. “I’m so sorry I haven’t said hi! Sapnap needed my help with something— that doesn’t matter right now, how are you?”

Tommy let himself relax in Puffy’s grip. “I’m alright,” he murmured.

“I’ve got a house close to here if you need somewhere quiet for a bit, we can sit down and talk, there’s—”

“Actually,” Tommy interrupted, “I just asked Niki to bring me to L’manburg.”

Puffy’s face fell.

“You could come with, if you’d like?” Tommy offered.

She glanced over at Niki who felt very tense next to Tommy.

“Sure.”

“Lead the way then, Niki,” Tommy said.

He followed the two women out of the community house. Tommy’s feet practically floated down the Prime Path, his muscle memory taking over. The path itself was barely changed other than assorted types of wooden planks used to path up the stray creeper hole. The buildings around them, however, were wildly different.

Tommy barely recognized anything around him. He’d get a glimpse of something that seemed familiar, a stray block or sign, but everything else felt cold and foreign.

“Everything looks different,” he murmured.

“Most of these buildings have been torn down and rebuilt over and over,” Puffy said, “I’m not sure why, but this area just hasn’t felt quite right in years.”

They passed the Holy Land, and sure enough, there was a little statue with a painting of Mellohi hung on its front. The stone looked old— cobble, of course— like it hadn’t been touched in years. In fact, the entirety of the Holy Land looked barren. It made sense, Tommy and Ponk were the only regular worshippers, but it hurt to see the church that Tommy remembered as gleaming white such a dull, dirty grey.

As they neared Tommy’s old house, he noticed a change in the area by the Path. There were flowers and trees planted everywhere, bees flitting between them. The path itself looked well maintained, no old or rotted wood to be seen.

The second Tommy’s dirt house came into view, he stopped in his tracks.

There were flowers covering every inch of his grass roof and lawn, all red and white, excluding a bouquet of alliums on the doorstep. The sign that labeled his house looked freshly painted, as did the wooden doors that Tommy used to regularly abuse.

In place of Ninja's abandoned house was a statue. It sat upon a pedestal of dark stone with an engraved golden sign on the front. A name, along with a message in a language Tommy couldn't read, was inscribed.

The statue itself was beautiful. It was carved from simple stone, smooth and without imperfections. It stood in a triumphant pose, one hand holding a disc raised to the sky, the other relaxed by his side. One leg was bent, resting on a low rock, allowing the statue's face to angle just slightly upwards as if gazing towards the sun while keeping the figure loose and casual. Extending from the statue's back was a pair of beautiful wings. Each feather was meticulously carved in a proper anatomical position, making it look like the figure was always meant to have wings, even in life.

The face was uncanny. It was grinning, not something happy and open, but lined with victory and stubbornness. It was an expression Tommy knew he wore quite often.

The statue was of Tommy, a memorial to his death, but here he was, standing below it despite everything.

"Who...?" Tommy trailed off.

Puffy stood beside him. "Me, Foolish, and an artist that happened to be travelling through. I believe their name was Finn August.

"Foolish never even met me."

She shrugged. "I don't think that mattered to him, he wanted to honor you anyway."

Tommy approached his old house, picking up the alliums. They were fresh, fresh enough to make him sneeze from the pollen.

“Ranboo asked me to take over for him while he was gone,” Niki said.

Tommy set the flowers back down and took a deep breath. “Let’s get to L’manburg.”

The rest of the walk was quiet.

Eventually, L’manburg’s remains loomed in front of them. It was worse than the destruction of the 16th— much, much worse. An obsidian grid hung in the sky above, and a giant crater cut through the ground, extending so far down that Tommy couldn’t see the bottom.

There was nothing left. Nothing at all.

Tommy stumbled down the staircase, unaware of his body moving itself. Niki and Puffy were saying something behind him, but it didn’t matter. Nothing did, not right now.

There was no way it was gone, there had to be *something* left. A house still standing on the edge, maybe? The podium?

Tommy tripped at the bottom of the staircase and skinned his knees, not expecting the uneven ground there, but he picked himself back up and started to run. There was grass licking at his feet, and trees waving in the breeze around him, but all Tommy could see were old scorch marks still marring the stone cliffs and crumbled piles of bricks where the foundations of houses used to be.

The ground gave way to air, and Tommy collapsed on the edge of the crater.

It went down to bedrock. There was an aquifer at the bottom, along with a L’manburg flag and some mushrooms, but there was nothing left of the L’manburg that Tommy knew. Wilbur’s L’manburg.

Had it all been for nothing, then? Wilbur's death, his exile? If this was how the story ended, what was the point of all the suffering he had been through?

Tommy used to stargaze during exile. Looking up at the stars, knowing that he was just a small part of the universe, it comforted him.

Now, looking at what used to be L'manburg, Tommy felt very, very small.

You should jump, that little voice whispered.

Tommy sniffed, trying to keep snot from joining the tears running down his face. He didn't want to. He didn't want to jump, because he wanted to live. He wanted to go home and cover Clementine with butterfly kisses until she couldn't stop giggling. He wanted to sneak up on Sean while he farmed and startle him into face-planting into the dirt. He wanted to get up early to see the sunrise and dance in the rain. He wanted to breathe.

Jump, it said.

A hand landed on Tommy's shoulder, making him jump. Puffy was looking at him, concern clear on her face.

"The edge isn't very stable," she said, "do you wanna come sit a bit further away with me?"

Tommy sobbed, shaking his head. He couldn't speak, he couldn't breathe, because there was this grief raging through him and he didn't know what to do.

"Tommy, you're hyperventilating," Puffy said.

He was tense all over, muscles straining against some invisible force, fighting against the wave of dread that rolled through his stomach and up to his teeth. Tommy clenched his fists

and leaned over himself. The edge of his forehead hung over empty air, and his hair ruffled in the breeze.

Jump.

Tommy shook his head over and over, signed, “*No, no, no, no, no,*” until he couldn’t feel his hands. He was better. He had gotten better.

And then there were arms pulling him away from the edge, and Tommy *shrieked*. Puffy and Niki were shouting something, but he didn’t have the state of mind to listen, much less understand. Tommy would have fought back, but he couldn’t feel his body anymore, caught somewhere between numbness and sparks pinging in his bones.

The arms held him against a chest, caging him in. The person was soft and warm, their heartbeat and breathing steady, but Tommy’s muscles kept tensing in waves and lungs stuttering on simple breaths.

He tried to calm down, tried to follow their breathing, anything, but his body wouldn’t listen, still stuck in a state of panic.

What if it never ends? the voice suggested.

Tommy gritted his teeth, choking on a sob, because *Prime* he wanted this gone, over and done with. His legs were on fire, the kind of hot that felt cold, locked in place after being over-strained. He couldn’t extend them because he couldn’t move, and so his body forced him to take the pain.

His breaths were heavy in his ears, whistling through his throat and rubbing it raw. Tommy wondered if his voice would be gone after this. Nevermind that, Tommy wondered if he’d be able to speak at all.

All the sacrifices he made for L'manburg were for nothing, and now all the progress he'd made away from the SMP was gone. He felt just as shaky as he was the night by the lava pool. Three years, useless. A waste.

He was a waste, draining everyone's time and energy. Dream had broken him, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't be fixed. He would just break over and over and over again, until the pieces couldn't fit back together again, and what's left of him would be left shattered.

It sounded exhausting and painful, and Tommy didn't know if he wanted to go through that.

A hand pressed against Tommy's chest, hard enough to cut through his tumultuous thoughts. It wasn't gentle, but it was grounding.

"— didn't know, and he was screaming—" That was Puffy's voice reverberating against his back.

"He'll be okay, just give him a second," Techno said. He sounded close to Tommy.

Tommy blinked away the tears in his eyes. A blurry pink and black shape was sitting in front of him, and distantly Tommy realized it was connected to the arm pressing on his chest.

They were sitting on the ground, and the ruins of L'manburg were conveniently out of Tommy's vision. Instead, as his eyes came into focus, all he got to see was Techno looming over him.

Tommy took in a shuddering breath, and another, and another. He was still shaking, but it was happening less and less.

His face felt frozen in a grimace, partially from the pain and partially because he still couldn't feel the muscles in his cheeks.

“Are you with us now, Theseus?” Techno asked, keeping the pressure on Tommy’s chest.

Tommy sucked in another breath. *“Gimme a fucking second, Prime.”*

He focused on moving his ribs up and down against Techno’s hand. In and out. In and out.

Puffy was still holding him against her chest. They were splayed out, and it couldn’t have been comfortable for her, but she didn’t try to move. Techno was crouched in front of them, sitting back on his heels, and covered from head to toe in armor. Niki was in the corner of Tommy’s vision, her eyes flicking rapidly between Tommy and her communicator.

Finally, Tommy was able to stretch his legs out and relieve the agonizing pressure on his muscles. He let his whole body relax and melt into Puffy’s back.

“Fuck, I forgot how much I hated those,” Tommy said.

“Uh, sorry to break it to you,” Techno said, “but we still can’t understand you.”

Tommy closed his eyes. Prime, he was tired. Could the universe stop being a fucking sadist and just give him one thing?

“Did he just pass out?” Puffy whispered loudly.

Tommy cracked an eye open. Techno was looking at Puffy like she was an idiot, which, fair.

“Aren’t you a therapist or something? Shouldn’t you be trained for stuff like this?”

Tommy could feel Puffy shift behind him. She lifted one hand to wave it around. “It was a self-appointed title! And I know how to deal with panic attacks, not whatever that was. It was like he was... feral, I don’t know!”

“That’s what all my panic attacks are like,” Tommy murmured. The endorphins running through him were loosening his tongue like they always did.

Techno frowned. “That doesn’t seem particularly healthy.”

Tommy shrugged, closing his eyes again and tilting his head back. “It’s not like I chose to come back here.”

That effectively killed the conversation.

Not for the first time, Tommy wished he could speak to Wilbur. Years ago he’d promised Tubbo that he wouldn’t become the next Wilbur, but anyone with half a brain could see that they took after each other. Too much, some would say.

Tommy didn’t want to go down the same path that Wilbur did, but sometimes it felt like it was inevitable. He just wanted someone who understood.

Speaking of...

“Where’s Ghostbur?” Tommy asked.

There was a very loud pause. Tommy opened his eyes and sat up.

Techno and Niki looked like someone had kicked their dog. Puffy wasn’t moving behind him.

“He, uh,” Techno started, “he heard you died. It took a few weeks for the memory to stick, but once it did, he said he was going to try and find you on the other side. Limbo, he called it.”

Tommy’s stomach dropped.

“No one has seen him since. I think he’s gone for good.”

It wasn’t enough for him to kill Wilbur, was it? He had to go and kill his ghost too. Or was Ghostbur not dead, just stuck wandering through the same plane of the afterlife looking for a boy that wasn’t there. Had Tommy cursed him to some sick hell of his own creation?

Tommy dropped his head into his hands.

Niki spoke up, “This seems like really bad timing, but Dream just messaged everyone on the server.”

Of course, because when did he ever get a break?

“What did he say?” Techno asked.

“It’s just a set of coordinates,” Niki said, “630, -2050.”

Tommy’s blood turned to ice. His muscles, however abused and tired, tensed again against his will. He started to shake just slightly, tremors shifting underneath his skin.

“Tommy?”

He shook his head.

“Does anyone know those coordinates?” Puffy asked. Silence. “They obviously mean something to Tommy, ask around if anyone is familiar with them, he’s shaking and I don’t—”

Tommy cut her off by squeezing her arm.

He took out the pen and hovered over his skin, pausing just before making a mark. Tommy didn’t want that on his arm.

So he shifted the pen to Puffy’s hand and pressed.

Exile

Chapter End Notes

so guess who's doing Nanowrimo this year! for yall that haven't heard of that, look it up, its a really cool writing event, but essentially, I'll be writing 50,000 words in November :D this will be my fourth year participating, and i won 2018 and 2019 (we dont talk about 2020) and i feel pretty good about this year. I'll be finishing up Vibrations and then starting something else for the remainder (cause it definitely wont take 50000 words to finish this fic lol) still don't know if it'll a fic or something original, ive got an idea for both. Who knows? But all that means that updates will be more frequent, in fact, the next chapter is basically completely written already :) also, marching season is over, so I can do things on saturday! wow, what a concept! just more time for writing, amiright? anyway, I hope you enjoy the chapter, maybe drop a kudos and comment if you liked it? I love responding to people's questions and ideas :D i also see your bookmarks and laugh at the funny ones. Adios!

also, look at the chapter count for a jumpscare

EDIT: SORRY I FORGOT THE STATUE IS BASED ON LATE AUGUST'S DESIGN FROM HIS ANIMATIC SHATTER GO WATCH <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKyF46Q6hDY&t=180s>

grave

Chapter Summary

grave - Index and middle finger pointed at an angle downwards, thumb upwards, and driven sharply downwards

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The path to Logstedshire's portal was no longer the scattered assortment of logs that Tommy remembered. Instead, it was a well-paved cobblestone bridge with railings and everything. Tommy brushed his hand against one of the posts; it was well-worn.

Chapter Notes

don't say I didn't warn you

also, double check the tags for some new warnings

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The walk to Logstedshire was tense. A small group of warriors trailed behind Tommy, all armed to the teeth. Statistically, there was no way they could lose. It was ten versus one, and even if Dream brought reinforcements, there was no beating sheer manpower.

The rest of the group didn't seem to agree with him. Quackity muttered something about "Doomsday and those fucking withers" and stalked away. Puffy just gave him a pat on the shoulder.

So Tommy's optimism was fleeing by the second. They had Technoblade, for Prime's sake, the best fighter Tommy had ever seen, they couldn't lose.

They couldn't.

It was unnerving, knowing that the destination in front of them could be their graveyard. Especially since it was once almost Tommy's. Dream had the upper-hand, he had the hostage, the time to prepare, the home turf. There could be anything there waiting for them.

Tommy was just glad Sean and Clementine were safe. Foolish and Michael had joined them in the arctic where they were all taking shelter in a hidden bunker of Techno's. Phil was meeting the group at Logstedshire, leaving Ranboo in their care, but he wasn't going to join in the hand-to-hand combat. He'd been in the air, firing arrows, keeping an eye out for surprises, and most importantly, relaying information to those not fighting. While Niki had described Foolish as a pacifist, apparently that was due to choice, not skill. He'd promised Tommy that he'd protect Sean and Clementine with his life.

If something happened to Tommy, they'd be alright, and that was the most he could ask for.

The path to Logstedshire's portal was no longer the scattered assortment of logs that Tommy remembered. Instead, it was a well-paved cobblestone bridge with railings and everything. Tommy brushed his hand against one of the posts; it was well-worn.

"Your main grave is in Logstedshire," Sam said, "we redid the path so people could attend the funeral and visit. I hope you don't mind."

Tommy shook his head. "No, just wondering why you put my grave in Logsted."

Sam shrugged. "L'manburg was gone by that point, so we figured it was the last place you called home."

Tommy's stomach rolled. He didn't say anything.

As they neared the portal, Tommy double-checked his supplies. Techno had kindly gifted him a set of netherite armor and weapons, and Tommy had raided his ender chest for gapples, potions, arrows, and the like. Everyone one else was just as geared up, if not more. Tommy didn't ask Techno if he brought any wither skulls; he didn't think he wanted to know.

Tommy was the first through the portal. The humid sea air hit his face, filling his nose with the smell of salt. Despite the warm breeze, Tommy felt like someone had dunked him in ice. It didn't help that it was well into night now, and the moon was hidden behind the clouds.

He headed to the right, pausing to make sure everyone else was behind him. Sure enough, bodies appeared through the portal one after the other, weapons already in hand. Tommy relaxed just slightly.

There was no longer ash in the air, but Tommy could still see the dirt tower he built so many years ago looming over the area. His stomach dropped like he was jumping off it again, but the feeling stayed, lining his body with lead.

Everyone took a moment to look up at it. There was something ominous about the tower, like it was watching them. Or maybe it was there to remind Tommy that he never really escaped, that no matter how hard he tried to run, his fate was always there, waiting at the top of the tower.

“Why did you build up if...” Niki trailed off. Tommy heard the question anyway. *Why did you build up if you weren't going to kill yourself?*

“I was— or, I was going to. I changed my mind at the top— landed in the water,” Tommy said.

Niki looked like she might be sick.

Logstedshire's remains looked exactly like how he'd left them, oddly preserved in a way that wood wouldn't be naturally. They must have done something to keep the rot away.

“Cheery place to have a funeral,” Tommy muttered as they approached.

“We didn't... it was on the beach.”

“Ah.”

Tommy passed through the entrance of Logsted and looked down at his grave.

The slopes of the crater had been evened out, and a staircase added on either side for easy access. In the center, sitting atop a smooth floor of stone, was a simple grave.

TommyInnit

July 4, 2004 - December 15, 2020

Leader, friend, brother

There were flowers resting in front of it, another bouquet of alliums alongside a few scattered white tulips and poppies.

Behind it was another statue, this time of two people. It depicted Wilbur and Tommy, both in their L'manburg uniforms, laughing and smiling at something the other said. Wilbur had his arm slung around Tommy's shoulder, and his face was more relaxed than Tommy could ever remember.

Tommy looked, well...

Tommy's head was on the floor, cracked in two. Dream was perched on Wilbur's shoulder, lazily swinging around the sword he used to decapitate Tommy's statue.

Tubbo was tied up and gagged, bound by his hands and feet to the base of the statue. His armor was gone. The very tip of Tubbo's right horn was missing, and his clothes were completely dirty and tattered, but other than that, he looked uninjured.

Dream looked exactly like he had three years ago. Mask on, green jacket, axe strapped to his back. Tommy scanned every inch of his person for something, some clue that would let them know what Dream was planning. He wasn't even wearing armor, for Prime's sake! There was nothing.

There was a muffled shout, and Tubbo tried straining against his restraints, but Dream simply knocked him face-down into the dirt.

"Would you look at that," Dream said, "I've got a welcome home party!" He hopped down from the statue, stepping over Tommy's grave and crushing the flowers. Tommy winced.

Tommy tried to say something, but he couldn't push the words out of his throat. Techno must have picked up on this and stepped forward.

"Sure, Dream. Now if you could let Tubbo go, that'd be great. I might not like the guy, but I've sorta got a problem with wrongful imprisonment."

"I'm well aware of your opinions on imprisonment," Dream laughed.

Ah, well that made sense now. Tommy had to hand it to Dream, it was a great plan on paper, but he underestimated Niki's abilities and how much Phil and Techno cared for Ranboo, and, fair, Tommy hadn't expected that either.

As if he was reading Tommy's mind, Dream continued, "How is Ranboo doing? I don't see him here— is he on his own secret rescue mission, or has he already forgotten how he abandoned his husband?"

Tubbo thrashed like a man possessed, but the ropes held. Tommy's heart felt like someone was slowly squeezing it with every breath he took.

"Either give up Tubbo or make your move, Dream," Sapnap snapped.

Dream didn't even turn his head to face Sapnap, as if he had never spoken in the first place.

"Keep your eyes open, everyone," Techno murmured, "Dream's always got a trick up his sleeve, and if he's approaching us first, then he definitely knows something we don't."

Tommy's skin prickled. A feeling in his gut told him to run, to hide, because there was something very, *very* wrong. He wanted to think it was his paranoia talking; it wasn't. He ignored it.

Puffy lifted her axe up. "You've got ten seconds, Dream."

"Well in that case," Dream said, "see ya!" He pulled a potion out of his hotbar and slammed it into the ground. Dream disappeared.

"Shit!" Sapnap cursed, "Everyone, back to back, keep your shields ready for an attack. Techno, on me, let's see if we can find him."

The two warriors rushed toward where Dream vanished, swinging their weapons at the open air.

Tommy dashed to the statue, dropping his sword and fumbling with the ropes. Tubbo was deadly still, and if Tommy couldn't see his eyes moving he would've checked to make sure he was still breathing.

"Tommy!" Sam yelled, "Leave Tubbo, he's probably bait, Dream is gonna—"

His words cut off with an "*oof!*" as Punz materialized out of thin air and slammed his shield into Sam's chest. He used his second of surprise to cut a gash into Sam's leg and pearl away.

“Shit!” Sam broke a healing potion on his leg, but Tommy knew he was still feeling the pain.
“Sapnap, we’ve got company!”

Techno and Sapnap rejoined the group in a flash. Most of the warriors had their backs to one another, keeping a close watch.

Tommy managed to get one of Tubbo’s hands untied, but the second it was free, Tubbo pushed him away. Another scream cut through the gag, but this one sounded like Tubbo was trying to tell him something. Tommy reached for the ropes, but Tubbo pushed him again.

“Go!” he was screaming. He was trying to tell Tommy to run.

All at once, all hell broke loose.

Someone invisible but covered in armor leapt from the trees and landed in the middle of the group. They slammed a potion onto the ground, and then everyone turned into floating pieces of armor.

Arms grabbed Tommy from behind, and he felt the cold wash of a potion flow over him, followed quickly by another that turned his muscles to liquid.

Weakness.

He screamed, but the arms were locking around his neck and cutting his air supply off. Tommy tried lifting himself off the ground to kick his abductor, but the weakness kept him from doing anything of real damage and tired him quickly.

All he could do was watch as the fight descended into chaos.

It seemed that no one had thought to bring milk except for Techno who was standing on the edge of the fight looking for something. An opening, a clue to an identity? Tommy didn’t

know. Unfortunately, that meant he wasn't looking behind him.

Someone leaped from the darkness, eyes glowing neon purple, and slammed the butt of their sword into the back of Techno's head.

He stumbled but regained his balance quickly, turning to face his opponent. Unfortunately, a familiar face looked back.

Ranboo, jaw unhinged and dripping with... something, stood at his full height, towering over Techno. There was no hint of recognition in his oddly colored eyes, only feral ferocity.

"But it turns out that Ranboo's enderman side takes over sometimes and sleepwalks, almost?" Niki said, "I still don't quite understand how it works, but Dream was able to control Ranboo."

Shit. Shit. Shit *fucking shit*. Tommy fought against the arms, but he was losing strength rapidly as the potion set into his bones.

Ropes wrapped around his wrists and feet, and his captor dragged him over to his tombstone, using it as an anchor to tie Tommy to. In seconds, he was tied tight to the cold stone.

Armor stepped in front of him, pausing for a second. "Nothing personal," a voice said, "sorry, Tommy."

Purpled.

Before Tommy could try and reply, the armor was gone, and Purpled joined the fray.

Techno and Ranboo were really fighting now, swords clashing and sending sparks up around them. Ranboo was using his hybrid abilities like Tommy had never seen, teleporting around

Techno to throw him off, using his long limbs and claws to shred Techno's arms, dodging any projectiles that came their way.

Techno managed to get a good cut on Ranboo's chest, but it wasn't deep, and Ranboo barely seemed to notice. In fact, it should have been deeper with the angle that Techno came at him with.

And then it hit Tommy.

He'd criticized Dream for underestimating how much Techno and Phil cared about Ranboo, and now Dream was making up for that by using that same care against them. Techno didn't want to hurt Ranboo, and Ranboo was too good and too aggressive for Techno to take down peacefully. Techno was going to lose.

Tommy felt like he was dying. This couldn't be happening— they were supposed to win. *They were supposed to win.*

He couldn't even tell who was fighting who anymore. There was a figure slumped on the ground by a tree. They weren't moving, but if their body was still there, they weren't dead. Tommy pulled against his restraints, feeling the rope rub against his skin over and over.

One of the figures was dripping blood, and a lot of it. Tommy watched them stagger backwards and fall onto one knee. Another figure came out of practically nowhere, thrust their sword into the space between their chestplate and leggings, pulled it out, and dove back into the battle.

The bleeding person clutched their stomach, now slowly turning visible due to the copious amount of blood covering it. Tommy watched them fall back onto their ankles, and then collapse on the ground.

Awesamdude was slain by Punz using Punzo Knife

Tommy screamed. His arms were on fire, but he kept, pulling, *pulling*, because people were dying, and it was his fault, his fault, *his fault*.

His friends, practically his family, were dying in front of him and he was forced to watch.

Forced to watch as someone's shield broke under the weight of an axe. Forced to watch them drop their weapon as they pleaded for mercy. He couldn't hear anything over the sound of blood rushing in his ears and wind in his throat, but he knew that stance, knew it too well. It was a last resort, a beg.

The axe came down.

CaptainPuffy was slain by Dream using Nightmare

Tommy was breaking. This was it. There wasn't any coming back from this, not ever. How could he, when this was his reality.

He was almost glad for the invisibility potions. Tommy didn't think he could survive seeing their faces.

Techno and Ranboo had made their way towards the shoreline, just barely still in Tommy's view. There were more cuts than bare skin on both of them, but neither looked anywhere close to stopping. Tommy tore his eyes away.

Dream reappeared in the trees just as the invisibility potion wore off of everyone. Punz and Purpled were nowhere to be found, leaving Sapnap, Niki, Fundy, Jack Manifold, and Quackity to recover for a short moment.

"You know," Dream mused, "that worked a lot better than I thought it would."

Quackity practically growled, “It’s still a six v four, fuckface. And I dare you to try and fight me, I won’t go down that easily.”

Dream shrugged. “Maybe. You’re staying visible, though. I want to see your face when you realize how badly you fucked up.”

“Bring it on, Dream.”

“I’ll make you all a deal,” Dream said, “I’ll give Tubbo up and stop fighting if you let me have Tommy. Back off now and no one else dies. That seems more than fair, right?”

Tommy’s heart stopped. He tensed, but he couldn’t do anything. They were going to give him to Dream again, and he was powerless to stop it. It was exile all over again.

“Fuck off,” Niki snarled.

“Well, let it be known I warned you.” Dream took his axe off his back.

The fight exploded again. Punz and Purpled appeared from invisibility, already slinging on new armor. They rushed in, Punz headed for Niki and Purpled headed for Quackity and Jack Manifold.

Sapnap readied his shield, and Dream jumped in.

Tommy watched Fundy gaze in horror at the fight, at the items of his friends scattered on the ground around him. Fundy looked down at Tommy, making eye contact with him. He shook his head.

Without a word, Fundy threw a pearl into the trees and vanished.

Tommy's body fell forward, leaning against his restraints. He was too tired to fight against them anymore. It was all he could do to keep his head up.

Purpled blocked a wide swing from Quackity and tossed a potion under his shield. Instantly, Quackity fell to his knees with a cry of pain, and Purpled splashed another. Quackity crumpled.

Jack Manifold alone was no match for Purpled, and he seemed to recognize that the second Purpled started to attack him one on one.

"Stop!" he shouted, "Purpled, stop!"

Purpled paused.

"If I give up Tommy, you won't kill me, right?" he panted.

Purpled shrugged. "That's what Dream said, yes."

Jack sheathed his sword and looked back at Tommy. "You killed me in exile," he said casually, as if they weren't in the middle of a bloody battle.

Every hair on Tommy's neck stood up. Jack was grimacing.

"I'm sorry," Tommy wanted to say but he couldn't move his hands, *"I didn't want to. I didn't mean to."*

Tommy watched in shock as Jack walked to the edge of the treeline, passing by Niki as she fought for her life against Punz.

“I’m staying for Niki’s stuff,” he declared, “nothing else.”

Purpled joined Punz, and as impressive as Niki was as a fighter, she was no match for two mercenaries who’d trained for years together. Quickly, they knocked her shield out of her hand and doused her with potions. Harming and weakness, if Tommy had to guess, based on the look of pain on her and Quackity’s faces.

Sapnap realized he was outnumbered, but it didn’t seem to phase him. If anything, he started fighting harder, pushing Dream towards the walls of Logstedshire. Tommy noticed him flick his hand, moving something from his inventory to his hotbar.

Unfortunately, Purpled did too. He swung his sword out, breaking the bottle that just appeared in Sapnap’s hand. It shattered, spraying the potion all over Sapnap who cried out in pain but managed to stay standing.

“Potion of harming,” Dream mused, “I see you’ve learned from Ant as well.”

“This isn’t a game though, Dream!” Sapnap spat, “You can’t just just play with people’s lives!”

Dream slammed his axe into Sapnap’s shield, not bothering with finesse or tactics now that Sapnap was too weak to do much of anything. When Sapnap stumbled, he did it again, and then Sapnap was on the ground just like the others.

“Dream, please—”

Sapnap was slain by Dream using Nightmare

Blood dripped from Dream’s axe. He turned, panting slightly, and looked at the carnage.

“I would’ve brought more rope if I knew this many people hated me,” he joked.

Niki and Quackity were tied to a tree. Punz and Purpled were sifting through the items scattered across the ground. The grass was sticky with blood. Jack Manifold was sitting in a tree, legs swinging below him, face shadowed by the leaves.

Technoblade and Ranboo were still fighting, but Tommy could see the effort was starting to get to Techno. His face pinched on every hit, and his sweat had mixed with dirt and his blood to create a muddy concoction that covered him.

Ranboo, on the other hand, looked more and more inhuman by the minute. Purple swirled underneath his black skin, and if Tommy looked closer, he could spot flashes of it on the white side as well. His claws were covered in blood and scraps of flesh and fabric. There were some caught in his teeth as well.

It felt wrong calling him Ranboo— it felt wrong calling him *him*. This was an it, a monster who happened to share Ranboo's face.

The thing tore into Techno, slashing and biting at anything left unexposed by his shield or armor. With a clang that ripped through the clearing, it ripped off a shoulder piece of Techno's chestplate.

Prime, where was Philza? Tommy hadn't believed that he would come to the defense of the others, but this was Techno. He was going to lose, it was obvious now, so where was Phil? Their defense in the skies?

Tommy's ears pounded as the eerie screeches of ripping metal multiplied in volume. The hybrid was gouging into netherite with every swing, turning Technoblade's best armor into paper scraps in seconds.

It lashed out once more, and Techno raised his sword and shield to block the hit. Instead of changing the angle, the creature simply pushed all of its weight forward and down, right onto Technoblade.

Tommy could see Techno's lips moving, obviously trying to say something to Ranboo, but it was clear nothing was getting through to him. Techno's arms were straining against Ranboo's inhuman strength, shaking with exertion. His face was grim but locked on Ranboo's.

It— Ranboo pushed, and Techno's back slammed into a tree, shaking the whole and causing a branch to come down just a few meters away. His shield cracked.

Ranboo swung again. Techno's shield split in half, but he didn't drop it, keeping the remaining wood in front of his vital areas.

Again and again, Ranboo attacked. It was all Techno could do to keep the remainder of his shield and sword lifted, and even his strength to do that was fading.

Finally, something cracked between them, Techno cried out, and the splinters of a shield exploded around them.

Ranboo snarled and lifted his arms.

“Stop.”

Dream's voice rang out clearly, and Ranboo stepped back.

Techno was leaning up against the tree, pressing his shield arm into his abdomen. It was clearly broken, but the pain didn't show Techno's face. His body, however, gave away his exhaustion. He was barely standing, using the tree to support himself, and he was panting heavily.

“Ranboo, c'mon, man,” Techno growled, “you gotta work with me here.”

The hybrid didn't move, didn't even blink.

“Move, and he kills you,” Dream said, “and I know you have a totem, but you may want to consider saving that for someone who really needs it.” Dream pulled something out of his inventory.

It was a huge feather, oil slick black, but no longer shiny. Instead, it was dripping blood.

Techno froze.

Niki cried out, “What did you do to him, you sick bastard!” Punz slammed his knee into her back, pushing her onto the ground again.

“That’s a flight feather,” Techno said slowly.

“Well,” Dream grinned, “he broke the rules. No flying.”

Tommy was going to be sick.

The sun was starting to rise, casting just enough light for Tommy to see the horror clearly written across Techno’s face.

“If he moves, kill him,” Dream ordered.

Dream turned away from Techno and Ranboo and looked at Tommy. His breath caught in his throat.

No, no, no, *no, no, no*.

He approached the gravestone, sitting back on his heels so he could look down at Tommy. With a gentle hand, Dream held Tommy's chin still.

Tommy thrashed, trying to escape his grip.

Quick as a viper, Dream grabbed Tommy's hair instead, pulling it back painfully so Tommy had no other choice but to look at him.

"Three years, and that's how you treat a friend?" Dream asked.

Tommy snarled.

Dream let go and stood up, wiping his hand on his pants. He stepped behind Tommy, out of his sight, and soon Tommy heard the sounds of Tubbo struggling.

Tommy's eyes flickered like a madman's, glancing around at anything and everything because there had to be *something, someone* to get them out of this. It couldn't end like this.

Please.

Dream dragged Tubbo past Tommy and out into the clearing, ignoring the way Tubbo's horns and skin caught on the ground. He shoved Tubbo to the ground unceremoniously and kicked him in the ribs.

"What did I tell you about attachments, Tommy?" Dream crossed his arms like he was a stern father scolding his child. "I took you away from everyone, I did them a *service*, I kept you company in exile, I even started to build you something, a home just for you, and you left me! You left everyone, but you didn't listen, you just went and dragged more people into your shit and now look at you."

Dream gestured to the battleground around him.

“Look at what you caused! Three people died because of you, Tommy, and if you’re not careful, there’s going to be more. You hurt so many people today just because you were too selfish to let go.”

Tommy shook his head. He couldn’t say anything— there wasn’t anything to say. Dream didn’t like it when he talked back.

“It’s alright, though, Tommy.” Dream took his axe off his back. “I can help you. We can get rid of your attachments— all of them.”

Just as Tubbo managed to get to his knees, Dream smacked him on the back of his head and onto his elbows. Tommy could barely hear his scream through the gag.

Quackity was unconscious, Niki was pinned down by Punz, and Techno was powerless, currently being watched by a hybrid more powerful than him.

There wasn’t a way out of this.

The sun breached the horizon, casting the clearing in a deep orange light. The water looked like someone had dumped gasoline on top and lit it ablaze. Tommy blinked tears out of his eyes, trying to etch every line of Tubbo’s face into his memory. Every scar, every wrinkle, even the new ones he barely got to know. He didn’t look away when Tubbo’s face contorted with pain, because if he lived through this and Tubbo didn’t, Prime forbid, he wasn’t going to let Dream get away with it. No sweet words and gentle touches could ever rewrite this memory. Tommy wasn’t going to forget.

“C’mon then,” Dream called, “you wanted your dramatic reveal, didn’t you?”

Tommy looked to the treeline where Dream was talking to, and his nightmare walked out from the shadows.

Tommy was dreaming. He was, because otherwise that meant that what he was seeing was real and it wasn't possible. He didn't—he couldn't—he shouldn't be alive.

But he kept walking forward, dragging a person beside him, and Tommy had to accept what was in front of him was real. And he didn't know whether he felt happiness, or anger, or guilt, or anything at all, because he was sure his body had simply too much to handle today and wouldn't wake up the next morning.

And then—

No.

Tommy was screaming, something had reached deep inside him and pulled out his heart, he was bleeding, *bleeding*, and pulling against the ropes but he couldn't move. He couldn't—Tommy was powerless.

It didn't matter if he died today, Dream had already killed him in every way that mattered.

Because standing before him, lit from behind by the burning sun, cast with a fiery halo that turned the stark white streak in his hair a pale peach, was Wilbur Soot. And at his feet, tied up, gagged, and bruised in a way that Tommy had had nightmare after nightmare about, was Sean.

Wilbur dropped Sean in front of him, reminiscent of a cat dropping a dead bunny on your doorstep, and grinned, sharp and full of resounding, open elation. There was a sword in his hand, dripping blood, and Tommy could see a cut on Sean's cheek.

“Hello again,” Wilbur said, and he sounded so, so happy, almost wondrous, and all Tommy could do was tip his forehead to the ground and cry.

I literally have no idea how yall are gonna react to this. I've been a little hysterical just thinking about it, lmao. I'm so nervous ahahahaha this is fine. But this was always gonna happen, ive had this idea for months upon months now. There's a reason Wilbur's character tag has literally been on this since the start. No one called me out on it somehow

Feel free to DM on twitter to scream, just go absolutely feral in the comments, im fine with cursing and joke death threats lol.

But uhhhhh, until next time.

:)

choice

Chapter Summary

choice - hand starts pointed downwards with the index finger and thumb extended and spread, pull the hand upwards and backwards in a smooth motion while pinching the index finger and thumb

-

“Hello again,” Wilbur said, and he sounded so, so happy, almost wondrous, and all Tommy could do was tip his forehead to the ground and hope it was a dream.

Chapter Notes

a little bit of context btw, Wilbur has been stuck in limbo for *checks notes* um, over 3000 years.....

so...

my bad?

EDIT: I CAN'T DO MATH I THINK HE WAS IN LIMBO FOR 98 YEARS BUT I HONESTLY DONT KNOW

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Hello again,” Wilbur said, and he sounded so, so happy, almost wondrous, and all Tommy could do was tip his forehead to the ground and hope it was a dream.

It wasn't real. He was hallucinating again— it made sense, he was in Logsted, it wasn't unreasonable to believe that he was seeing things again.

“Tommy? Why won't you look at me?” The-Thing-That-Wasn't-Wilbur asked. It's voice was wrong, it didn't sound like Wilbur. Too raspy, like it hadn't spoken in years, and too quiet, like it wasn't used to its own voice.

Tommy shook his head, eyes squeezed tight. “You aren’t real.”

“Wha— of course I’m real, Tommy, I’m alive!” He wasn’t. He wasn’t.

A hand grabbed his hair and yanked it backwards, forcing Tommy to look up. Dream and Wilbur were still there, both holding weapons to their captors, which meant either Purpled or Punz were behind him. Tommy couldn’t move his eyes off Wilbur to check.

Wilbur was fidgeting, filled with some nervous energy that reminded Tommy of the worst days in Pogtopia. His eyes wouldn’t stay still, jumping from Tommy to Dream to the horizon and back again.

“Can— Dream, can—” Wilbur winced, “I need—”

Dream waved his hand. “Go ahead.”

Wilbur’s sword disappeared into his inventory, and he dashed toward Tommy, skidding and landing on his knees. The second Wilbur lifted his hands, Tommy closed his eyes, but he still felt hands on his face. Warm hands.

“I’m alive, tell me I’m alive,” Wilbur whispered, a manic edge in his voice.

He was, wasn’t he? Dream had responded to him, so he wasn’t just Tommy’s hallucination. And— that was Wilbur’s skin on his, a touch he thought he’d never have again.

Tommy’s breath hitched. “You’re alive.”

Wilbur grinned, his eyes scrunched up and slightly shiny. “I’m alive,” he agreed, “I came back for you, and I’m never going back.”

Wilbur's hands were shaking, in fact, his whole body was. It looked like he was a second away from falling apart.

"Wilbur," Dream called.

"Fuck off," Wilbur snapped, uncharacteristically aggressive, "I haven't seen him in..." Wilbur's eyes unfocused and then snapped back. "Too long!"

There was something wrong with Wilbur, and that wasn't Tommy brain's trying to trick him for some bullshit. This was Wilbur, but something was *wrong*.

Wilbur took his hands off Tommy. "Just give me a few minutes to do what Dream wants and I'll get you out of here, okay?" Wilbur grinned, like he hadn't just been holding a hostage moments ago. "We'll be together again."

Tommy couldn't say anything as Wilbur stood up and returned to his place beside Dream. *His place*. Prime, just the thought made Tommy sick.

"Don't you understand, Tommy? Dream's not our enemy anymore— he revived me! I've got a whole new life ahead of me because of him! I mean—" Wilbur's tone dropped. "Didn't you miss me?"

No, Tommy wanted to say, *I missed the man I thought you were*.

Wilbur perked up again. "Well, I missed you. Did you know, I felt the afterlife making a place for you— a few times, actually. But, uh," Wilbur laughed nervously, "you never came! I waited, and you never came, but that's alright because I'm here now!"

Tommy didn't even want to think about how many times he was near death enough for Wilbur to sense it. In fact, he didn't want to think about the afterlife at all— not the fact that it existed, or that Wilbur was trapped there for years, or that *Dream of all people* could revive the dead.

Oh Prime. If he had jumped and died...

Dream seemed to realize exactly what Tommy was thinking about, saying, “Did you hear that, Tommy? No matter how far you run, where you go, alive or dead, you’ll never *really* escape me.”

Wilbur rolled his eyes. “C’mon, Dream, stop being so ominous. Or do I have to play along to repay the debt?” His voice dropped, turning husky like it did when he would sneak out of Pogtopia for an hour and come back smelling of smoke. And his face... Prime, it looked hollow. His eyes were empty, projecting the emotions that should have been there, but Tommy could see straight through.

“How does this sound? *Let’s be the bad guys, Tommy!*” Wilbur giggled, a stark contrast to his tone. “*It was never meant to be. My unfinished symphony!*”

It was as if Wilbur was a puppet, limbs and mouth moved by someone that knew of him but never really got to know *Wilbur*. He was leaning forward, putting his weight onto his toes, and shifting his balance back and forth to some beat that only he could hear. His eyes wouldn’t focus on anything— especially Sean— for longer than a second. His hands wouldn’t still. It was all wrong.

“Sounds great, Wilbur,” Dream said, obviously mocking, but Wilbur didn’t seem to notice.

“Can we get this show on the road?” Wilbur asked. “There are things I wanna get out there and do— and see!” His tone took on an excited color. “Like the sunrise! Look at it, it’s beautiful, that’s *my* sunrise!”

He was right, it was beautiful. The clearing was cast in this soft, golden light that washed away the splatters of blood on the ground and the trees. Tubbo and Sean’s faces, however marked up, looked like an oil painting made of those rich umber hues. Tommy could see a few strands of his own hair dangling in his face, looking more like spun gold than his normal straw blond.

It was breathtaking, but Wilbur was looking upon a massacre and commenting on the sunrise.

In the growing light, it was easier to see the two people in front of him. Tommy's eyes scanned both Tubbo and Sean, looking for any serious injuries.

Sean lifted his head and locked eyes with Tommy. He couldn't help but gasp.

Sometimes, Tommy forgot that Sean hadn't gone through everything he had, or that anyone hadn't. Other times, it was frighteningly obvious. This was one of those times.

Sean looked terrified. It was painted all over his face, pressed into the creases of his expression so deeply that Tommy was worried the lines would never leave.

His eyes.

Prime, his eyes, normally a quite ordinary brown, were glowing like amber in the light. They were also shining with tears that didn't seem to disappear even as they ran down his face. In his eyes were a reflection of the bone-deep horror that Tommy felt.

His hands twitched, trying to get out of the rope with one last feeble attempt. He wanted to talk to Sean so desperately it felt like he'd never wanted anything else in his life. Dream, that bastard, he took Tubbo, he killed Tommy's friends, he hurt everyone else, and now he was keeping Tommy from talking to his— to Sean.

Tommy wanted to tell him it would be okay. He wouldn't actually, even if he could sign, because it'd be a lie, but he wanted to be able to say it and know it was true. Tommy didn't think he could ever be okay after this.

Oh my Prime, where was Clementine? She was supposed to be safe with Foolish and Sean, but Sean was kneeling in front of Tommy and Foolish was a stranger that was nowhere to be

found. Dream had killed Phil— *Prime, please be alive* — just to get to Sean, who else had he killed?

Was Clementine alive?

She had to be. There wasn't any other possibility. She was alive, because Tommy's heart might just stop on its own if she wasn't.

Prime, please, he could die, just let her be alive.

"You'll get your moment, Wilbur, don't worry," Dream said. He yanked the gag out of Tubbo's mouth, and Tommy was horrified to see it spotted with blood.

Tubbo spat on the ground and licked his teeth. "You're going to fucking die, you fucking piece of shit. Just wait till I get my fucking nukes, or my rocket launchers, I'll load them up with the shit that really burns and stick right up your fucking a—"

Dream cut him off by shoving the gag back in his mouth. Tubbo tried to bite him, but Dream was too quick and the cloth too dense. Wilbur snickered.

"Control yourself, Tubbo, we wouldn't want anything to happen to Ranboo, would we?"

Instead of the panic Tommy expected, Tubbo simply narrowed his eyes, not even looking over at Ranboo. Tommy wondered if there was something he was missing or if Tubbo was just being obstinate to keep from breaking down.

Dream looked back at Tommy, his smiley-face mask boring into Tommy's tired soul.

"You know," Dream said casually, like they were chatting over brunch instead of bodies, "I've been meaning to ask you a question for *ever*, but I just couldn't find the time, but since you're here now, it's my perfect opportunity!"

Tommy shook his head, grimacing.

“Oh don’t be like that. I’m just curious. See, you’re just *fascinating*, Tommy, because for all you yell and scream and whine about the things I’ve taken from you or the people I hurt, you’re actually a hypocrite!”

Dream whirled around, holding his arms out. “Can you all believe that? The great Tommyinnit, a *hypocrite*. Because you burnt down George’s house to make me mad, you threatened Spirit to try and force my hand, and you were willing to trade your discs to get what you wanted. Well—” Dream paused, “I should say *disc*. ”

Tommy desperately tried to figure out where Dream was going with his latest dramatic speech, but he was fixated on how close Wilbur’s sword was to Sean’s neck, and the cuts on Sean, and Wilbur’s fidgeting, and Tubbo’s—

“Tommy!”

He snapped back to attention.

“I’m teaching you a lesson,” Dream snarled, “the least you could do is listen to me.”

Tommy nodded.

“Good. Now, as I was saying, the original deal during the duel was for you to give up a disc when you lost, correct?”

Tommy nodded again, but his neck was stiff and all he wanted to do was use his hands like Sean had taught him.

Dream hummed. “I wonder what would’ve happened if you stuck with that deal. What disc would you have chosen? They’re of equal importance to you, correct? So how could you be so cruel as to give one up?”

The dots connected, and Tommy didn’t like the picture.

Prime, please let him be wrong.

Dream lifted his axe again, pressing it firmly against the side of Tubbo’s neck, enough for a few drops of blood to run down and disappear behind his armor.

“We’ve got to get rid of your attachments,” Dream said, “why not answer my question at the same time?”

No. Please, no, he couldn’t do this.

“If you had to choose, who would it be?”

Tommy’s stomach dropped.

“Your so-called best friend who you’ve known your whole life but exiled you against your will and left you for dead? Or this stranger you’ve somehow guilted into replacing him?”

Wilbur’s sword was back in his hand, and it was hovering by Sean’s neck.

Tommy didn’t answer. He couldn’t.

“Cat got your tongue? Who’s it gonna be, Tommy?”

He was trying, but he couldn't, it wouldn't work, *he couldn't*.

"Can't decide? Here, let's let them make their case." Dream ripped out Sean's gag.

Sean was yelling before the thing was even all the way out. "—can't talk, you crazy, soulless, horrible excuse for a person!" Sean yanked at the ropes around his wrists, somehow not even looking at the sword that Wilbur held close by.

Dream's head tilted. "Can't talk? I could've sworn I heard him earlier."

Sean clenched his teeth, refusing to say anything else.

Dream locked onto Tommy, practically stalking forward. He got down to Tommy's level, mask so close that Tommy could see the imperfections in the quartz. The black dots looked back.

"Are you too scared?" Dream teased, "Did I knock a few screws loose up there? Is the great Tommyinnit still broken after all these years? That's just proof, really, you'll never get away from me."

He leaned in close to Tommy, mouth hovering by his ear.

"Next time," Dream whispered, "I'll tear your vocal chords out of your neck and feed them to the wolves, and then I'll watch you try and scream. How long will it take you to realize it's pointless— or will your body keep trying to push something out your mangled throat?"

Tommy wanted to throw up. There was this horrible, aching feeling inside of him, one that threatened to pull everything he was made of into its endless black maw and chew him up till he was nothing. A black hole, constantly pulling at his attempts to breathe, to live. He was past the event horizon now— there was no going back.

Dream leaned back. “How do I get him to talk?” he asked Sean.

“You— he can talk with his hands. I’ll translate.”

Dream fiddled with the knots for a second, and Tommy held deadly still. Then, his right hand was freed just enough to move it in front of his chest. It wasn’t any semblance of freedom, but Tommy latched onto it.

“I’m sorry,” he said, repeating it over and over, *“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”*

“What is he saying?” Dream asked.

Sean just shook his head.

“Wilbur.”

The sword came to rest against Sean’s neck. Something mangled came out of Tommy’s throat, a bastardization of a scream and a whimper.

“Tell me what he said,” Dream ordered.

Sean was crying harder now. “He said ‘I’m sorry.’ Just that, repeated.”

Dream tutted. “Sorry doesn’t cut it, Tommy. You knew what the consequences were, this is your fault.”

Sean shook his head and opened his mouth to say something, but Dream had a crossbow in his offhand, and it was pointed at Sean's head.

"Speak and you're dead."

Sean closed his mouth, but the fire in his eyes remained, and Tommy held onto it like a life raft. This wasn't his fault, it was Dream's, Dream was manipulating him, he was wrong.

Dream sighed. "So, I'll ask one last time, which one? And don't bother with the whole three lives thing, I've taken care of that. Death is mine to control, and if I want it to be permanent, it will be."

Oh Prime, he wasn't lying, was he? If he could bring Wilbur back, he could keep Sean there, even with two lives remaining.

Tubbo was looking at Tommy, desperately trying to catch his eye. There was just a slight shift in his shoulders if Tommy looked close enough. He was shaking his head. Tommy knew what he was trying to say.

I'm not worth it.

But Tubbo had a kid and a husband. Tommy could see the golden band on his horn gleaming in the sunlight. Michael, their kid, Tubbo had said he was six. Could he kill a six year old's father?

Prime, was he really fucking thinking about this? What was he doing?

"I'm not playing your sick fucking game, Dream."

Sean hesitated, then translated it word for word, including the curse. Tommy couldn't help but let his mouth quirk up in a bittersweet smile.

“Choose one or I kill them both, and you really don’t need more blood on your hands,” Dream spat.

Tommy shook his head.

Dream swung his axe.

Someone screamed, and there was red, and Tommy could feel the skin around his wrists burning as he pulled at his restraints, and there was more red, and Tubbo was slumped to the ground like someone had cut his strings, and *he* was red, and Tommy was screaming, and—

Tubbo was breathing. Tubbo was moving, he was alive, he was clutching his arm, and—

Dream cut his fucking hand off.

Tommy was going to rip him limb from limb and feed him to the pigs. There was fire in his veins that was itching for blood, and if Tommy could just get out of these *fucking restraints*—

He yanked them with a scream, but all it did was send white pain shooting up his arms and trickles of red down his hands.

Tubbo was sitting up, breathing through his teeth, but breathing the same. His arm. His left arm, the one without the missing fingers, was missing from just above the wrist. Tommy gagged.

Dream splashed a potion carelessly on Tubbo, not even bothering to aim for his arm. Wilbur winced as it landed. The sword by Sean’s neck had slowly drifted further and further away, but Dream hadn’t seemed to notice.

Tubbo's— stump was bleeding only sluggishly now, thanks to the potion, but Tommy knew it had done nothing for the pain. They both knew it would only get worse if Tubbo didn't get immediate help.

"Next one is his head," Dream said.

Tommy couldn't breathe. There was blood all over Tubbo, and it was his fault, and if he said nothing it would get worse, but he couldn't speak, much less *choose*. He couldn't do this, but he had to.

He had to.

Dream had made it clear. One of them wasn't going to live through this. There wasn't any way for Tommy to get around it. Tommy couldn't wrap his brain around it, but it was simple.

Sean was pointedly looking away from Tubbo, most likely to avoid the gore. Tommy remembered how he cried when one of the villager's lambs was mauled by a wolf and they buried it out in the plains. He hadn't been able to eat meat for a week.

"It's okay," Sean was mouthing, *"Choose him. It's okay. Choose him."*

If Tubbo wasn't practically catatonic from his forced amputation, Tommy knew he'd be saying basically the same thing.

He had to choose someone.

Tubbo had a family. So did Sean. They both were essentially on one life, but Tubbo had had time to come to terms with his impending death. Sean was so innocent, he had his whole life ahead of him, but Tubbo was finally happy after years of trauma, he had just restarted his life.

Could he survive losing Tubbo right after just getting him back? Could he survive losing either of them?

Tommy didn't want to admit it to himself, but he knew.

Tubbo was his best friend. Sean was, well, Sean was more than that. So, so much more.

He couldn't live without Sean, and it was that simple.

Tommy raised his hand. *"Save Sean. Let him go."*

Sean's eyes widened.

"Well?" Dream asked.

Sean took a deep breath. *"I love you,"* he mouthed, and looked away from Tommy.

"He said to save Tubbo," Sean said, "spare Tubbo and let him go."

No.

That's not what he said.

Tommy was frozen. His body had stopped working. His limbs wouldn't move, his heart had stopped, he was dead, floating above himself like a ghost because he couldn't speak and Sean had just sacrificed himself and Tommy was going to lose him.

Tommy screamed, something silent and broken and only inside his mind.

Sean had taught Tommy to forgive himself for his voice, to love himself anyway. Sean had listened. And now Tommy had never hated himself more, because Sean was using Tommy's lack of voice against him.

Sean was going to die.

“Good job, Tommy.”

Dream raised his axe.

Sean was going to die.

Wilbur dropped his sword to his side, holding out a hand, and said, “Hey, wait a minute—”

Purpled appeared out of nowhere and dragged Wilbur back.

Sean was going to die.

Tommy could see Sean's tears glint in the reflection on Dream's blade.

Sean closed his eyes.

The axe came down.

SeanOfBethel was slain by Dream using Nightmare

There was so much red. Tommy couldn't— he—

Dream was standing over a body, his axe covered in more of the blood. Tommy tried to focus, but he couldn't get his eyes to work. There was a body, and something felt very, *very* wrong, but Tommy didn't know what was happening.

Someone yelled, but it was quickly muffled. Purpled had a hand over Wilbur's mouth and an arm trapping Wilbur's back against his chest. Tommy's brain struggled to keep up, to connect the dots.

He needed to get up. Sean needed his help. He couldn't find Sean.

Tommy tried to stand up, but there was something holding him down. He couldn't feel it, but his body stopped and something in his brain screamed that he was hurting himself, but there wasn't any pain. Tommy tugged over and over until something pushed him back down. He stayed down.

Dream pulled out a book, and— oh, Tommy recognized that, it was the same thing he held when Wilbur showed up. Because Wilbur was alive. He wasn't dead, because— because—

Tommy's head hurt, so he closed his eyes.

Dream started chanting. It sounded weird, floating in and out of Tommy's ears, or maybe that was just him. Everything sounded funny.

There was a loud band, and the chanting stopped. More noises started, yelling and metal clashing, but Tommy was so, so tired and he wanted to sleep.

Wait. Something was wrong. He had to help Sean.

Tommy opened his eyes just in time to see a figure in the trees raise a trident and summon lightning directly on top of Dream.

Dream staggered, but he wasn't dead, and the figure jumped down to meet Dream's axe with his own.

Tommy wondered if he was dreaming. He didn't want to watch. Not because he didn't want to see Dream die— did he want Dream dead?— but because he didn't want to hope. He didn't want this to be fake just for him to open his eyes and see the body.

There was a body.

There wasn't a body. It was gone. The red was still on the ground, coating the grass and sinking into the dirt, but no body. Had he dreamed it? Was it another hallucination? Was that all this was?

Where was Sean?

Tommy tried to focus on the fight in front of him. Sean had been here a moment ago, so he must have gotten caught in the chaos.

Phil was there— was he not dead? Dream had said he was dead, but Phil was there, and his skin was covered in gold dust and flakes and red. His robes were soaked in it. There was a gash in his shirt.

He was raining arrows down on Dream, helping the stranger keep him at bay, because even with the magical lightning, Dream was clearly the better fighter.

A glint of something caught Tommy's eye, and he managed to see Niki's face right before she ran her sword through Purpled's back. She was grimacing, but there was a strength set in her features that Tommy desperately memorized.

Something popped, and Purpled was covered in green and gold particles. He emerged from the cloud staggering and holding his stomach, and his skin was gilded like Phil's. Niki looked ready to attack again, but Purpled pulled an ender pearl out of his inventory and lobbed it towards the trees. In a flash, he was gone.

Niki collapsed, but with a wicked grin on her face, and Wilbur dragged her out of the immediate danger.

Across the clearing, Dream screamed, "RANBOO!"

The enderman leaped away from his place guarding Techno. He was about to barrel into the stranger when Tubbo managed to propel himself off the ground and jump into Ranboo's path. They both tumbled to the ground, Ranboo hissing and lashing out, but Tubbo managed to get on top of him and grab Ranboo's face.

Tommy tried to scream, to tell Tubbo that Ranboo was dangerous, but he wasn't in his body to control it anymore.

Whoever was behind him finally moved, dashing towards Ranboo and Tubbo.

Tubbo sat on Ranboo's chest, hands cupping his cheeks, and gently butted their foreheads together. His lips were moving, but Tommy couldn't hear him over the din of fighting.

Ranboo blinked, and then his eyes were back to normal.

Punz was a few meters away from them, sword raised. Tubbo couldn't see. Tubbo was looking at Ranboo.

Ranboo looked up.

Purple particles burst to life around them, and Tubbo and Ranboo disappeared.

Tommy's head swam.

And then Punz had an axe in his back, Tubbo's hand wrapped around the handle.

Punz was slain by Tubbo_ using Bane o' Bees

The body disappeared before it could hit the dirt.

Ranboo grabbed Tubbo's shoulder, and they were gone again, leaving only purple sprites to drift to the ground they stood on not a moment before.

Techno had rejoined the fight, armor slung haphazardly around himself. Tommy hadn't even seen where he got it from. The stranger, Techno, and Phil were all fighting Dream, a deadly onslaught from all sides, and Tommy could see Dream tiring.

If Tommy could make any sound, he would've been giggling. He was properly delirious, not really taking in the scene around him. The image of Dream lifting his axe above Sean's just kept replaying over and over behind his eyes. Sean was alive, he was just hiding. There wasn't a body. Or his brain was simply hallucinating an impossible scenario to keep himself sane, that's what was happening. It had to be.

The fight turned entirely on Dream at the same second that three people ran back into the clearing. Puffy, Sam, and Sapnap, wearing assorted pieces of armor that they'd obviously thrown on during the run back from respawn. They didn't even have a chance to do anything, because Tommy heard a thump, and then—

Dream was slain by Technoblade using The Axe of Peace

Well that was ironic.

Dream's death didn't register with Tommy. Nothing did. It wasn't real. It couldn't be.

Someone was untying him. Tommy couldn't look away from the blood dripping off Techno's axe. It was running down the edge of the dark netherite, splashing on the ground. Tommy wanted to say something, to tell Techno he was getting blood everywhere, but he couldn't. There was blood on his axe.

Drip.

His hands were free.

Drip.

The ropes fell at Tommy's knees, completely loose.

Drip.

There was red below him, slowly trickling towards the gravestone he was tied to. Tommy followed its path out of Logsted's crater and back into the clearing. The blood from earlier, it had made its way to Tommy.

Tommy wiped his hand through it. His hand was red. Someone was grabbing his hand and trying to wipe away the blood. Tommy wanted to tell them to stop, he wanted to touch the blood, it came to him, it was trying to tell him something. He reached out with his other hand, but that one was stopped as well.

Drip.

Hands. There were hands on his face. Oh, those were Puffy's hands. When did Puffy get here?

Puffy's lips were moving, but there wasn't any sound. Could Puffy not talk? Tommy would teach her sign language, she would enjoy that. They could not talk together! Tommy smiled. That would be fun.

Puffy's face was gone. Oh, there's another one. Tommy squinted, trying to get his eyes to focus.

Brown eyes. Freckles. Pale skin. Tommy always teased him about that pale skin.

But Sean's cheeks were red, and that meant there was blood flowing under that pale skin, and *that* meant that Sean was alive.

Wait.

Of course Sean was alive, he couldn't be dead.

He couldn't be.

Dream hadn't killed Sean.

There wasn't any blood, there wasn't an axe, there wasn't a head rolling across the grass, eyes dulled and hair matted with—

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut and gagged.

It—

The body was Sean's. Dream killed him.

Tommy opened his eyes, but Sean's face was still there. He shook his head, lips moving uselessly, praying to some god to spare him from the hope that was racing through him. Tommy couldn't take this.

Sean wasn't alive, he wasn't in front of Tommy. Sean was dead.

Tommy reached out a shaky hand, fingertips brushing against Sean's skin. It certainly felt real. Sean's cheeks were moving under Tommy's hands, but Tommy couldn't focus on why, just the fact that they were. His skin, his muscles were moving and Tommy could feel it.

Sean was alive.

Sean was alive.

He didn't understand how, and something in his brain still whispered about it being a trick, but it was a trick that Tommy desperately wanted to be real, so he let it be.

Sean was fine, he was right in front of Tommy. Tommy was touching Sean, and Sean was alive.

And if Sean was fine, that meant everything was fine, right? Sean wouldn't let him get hurt, he promised.

Tommy was tired.

He leaned his head forward into Sean's chest— warm and still beating, closed his eyes, and let out a sigh.

Consciousness slipped from his grasp.

Chapter End Notes

alright be honest how many people read the line about Sean dying and just thought I straight up lied about the MCD lol, i just wanna know, its for science

also MAJOR BIG NEWS, HEY ALL THE PEOPLE THAT SKIP THE END NOTES LOOK AT THIS! I've created a series for all the fics in the Vibrations AU, check it out. I'm currently working on a timestamp fic from Sean's POV, and chapter 1 is already out. For all you Sean lovers out there, you're getting backstory, inner thoughts, and even more angst, what more could you possibly want?

So i actually forgot about the three lives system so thanks to that one commenter on the last chapter, you singlehandedly gave probably hundreds of people heart attacks. Phil and Foolish were originally gonna show up right before Dream swung the axe. Haha, i like this version better lol

Sorry this took so long to come out, ive majorly fucked up my back lol (a sorta common occurrence) and Im basically living on a heating pad whenever i get the chance. So, the pain wasn't really helpful while writing probably the hardest chapter of this book. I also entirely rewrote this chapter like almost two times. Whoops

Also, check out [this tiktok](#) from my beloved Beth. I watch it every day and giggle, but I don't have tiktok so you all have to give it some love from me :D also she's gonna kill me cause she predicted the whole choice trope that ive had planned for months now and I lied to her face lmao

Thanks for all the love last chapter, I really appreciate you all <3 drop a comment if you'd like, and don't forget to follow me on twiter, link below!

I love you

Chapter Summary

I love you - point to yourself, then arms crossed over the hands, palms flat on the chest, and then point to the person you're speaking to

-

“—ommy? Tommy! Is he okay? Is he hurt, what's wrong? Phil! PHIL! I don't know what's going on, he won't wake up, I don't—”

Chapter Notes

SURPRISE THERE'S AN EPILOGUE HAHA GET FOOLED YOU IMBECILES

I just checked the word count how is this 7000 words im--

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“—ommy? Tommy! Is he okay? Is he hurt, what's wrong? Phil! PHIL! I don't know what's going on, he won't wake up, I don't—”

“Someone stop the bleeding on his head— we need a health pot!”

“Tommy! I'm so, so sorry, please. Tommy, you need to w—wake up, please.”

“Sean, you need to move, mate.”

“But I left him and— and h— he got hurt and I can't—”

“Sapnap, Sam, we need you over here!”

“C’mon, he’ll be okay, Sean— no, Sean!”

“TOMMY!”

...

It took considerable effort for Tommy to pull himself out of sleep. The room was still dark which meant Sean had actually remembered to turn the lights off after he got up to work on the carrot farm. That, or Sean had slept through sunrise for the first time in his horribly normal and healthy life, and Tommy could finally get him to sleep in.

A man could dream, right?

He hadn’t been woken up by crying which meant Clementine was still asleep, but she probably would be soon, crying for breakfast even though it felt like she was eating every waking second recently. Tommy wanted to strangle the human body for its concept of growth spurts.

Tommy blinked his eyes open, letting them adjust to the slight amount of light. Normally the sun would’ve cast his bedroom in some light, which meant Tommy had actually woken up early. He congratulated himself in his mind and debated going back to sleep just for the hell of it.

But he was already awake, and maybe he could guilt Sean into making some of that delicious carrot bread if he did some chores around the house. *The house*. Not Tommy’s house, just the house. At some point Sean had practically moved in and his brain had just accepted it.

Tommy snorted. Sean was particularly good at worming his way into things. He didn't let people think he knew what he was doing, instead preferring to play up a dumb blond act, but he was a mastermind at getting people to open up. Tommy had experienced it first hand and hadn't even realized what happened until they had a fucking kid together, for Prime's sake.

He pushed himself to a sitting position and threw the blankets off himself.

Wait.

Tommy blinked again.

This wasn't his bedroom. This wasn't the house.

The walls were spruce and stone brick, and he must have been underground, because there weren't any windows. The only source of light was coming from a trapdoor in the ceiling underneath a ladder.

Tommy got to his feet, trying to piece together what happened. He was eating dinner, cleaning up and moping because Sean wasn't back from his trip yet, and the village alarm went off, and—

Oh fuck. Fuck shit balls shit shit fucking fuck.

Sean.

Tommy scrambled up the ladder, throwing the trapdoor open, and came face to face with lots of people sitting around a large dining room table covered in food.

The chatter of multiple conversations stopped at once, and Tommy barely had time to register the scraping of a chair against the floor before a tiny body barrelled into him.

“Daddy!” Clementine squealed, climbing up his legs like a fucking monkey and latching onto his arms. Tommy tentatively hugged her back. “You awake!”

Tommy buried his face in Clementine’s hair, feeling her warmth and breathing her scent. Thank Prime she was okay. With her weight in his arms, Tommy felt like he might actually be able to face whatever happened... however many days ago.

“Hi, Clem,” Tommy whispered, refusing to loosen his hold on her now that she felt more real. One hand was splayed against her back, clutching her body to his chest, and the other was holding up her weight so she could throw her arms around his neck and slump against him.

“You, you were sleeping, and Tata was sad,” Clementine said, wriggling in his arms, “but, but you awake now!”

Tommy wanted to cry. “Yeah, I am, sweetheart.”

He finally looked up. Everyone in the room was looking at him, Puffy, Sam, Phil— was Niki crying?

It didn’t matter.

None of them mattered, because Sean was staring at him, a flurry of emotions on his face, half out of his chair like he wanted to tackle Tommy just like Clementine.

Dream had killed Sean, but he hadn’t *killed* him. Tommy had seen Sean’s head at his feet, but here he was, smiling just slightly at the sight of Tommy.

He was alive. It wasn’t a hallucination, he really was alive, and Tommy could hardly believe it because when had the universe ever let him have a happy ending?

“*Sean*,” Tommy said.

Sean stood slowly, looking so nervous that he was practically vibrating. Tommy noticed everyone clearing out of the room, but he honestly couldn’t give less of a shit what they were doing, because Sean was about to burst into tears and Tommy really, really wanted to hug him.

“Tommy, I’m so, so sorry, Dream was looking for me and Clem, and I couldn’t—”

Tommy cut him off by pulling Sean into the tightest hug he could give him with only one arm and a child squished between them. Tommy’s hand ghosted over the back of Sean’s neck, vaguely remembering being fascinated with the feeling of skin under his fingertips when he was delirious from shock.

There were two warm bodies pressed against Tommy, and they were okay. Everything was fine. Everyone was safe.

Sean was crying and shaking like a leaf, so Tommy lowered them until Sean was a crumpled heap half in Tommy’s lap and Clementine right beside him.

Clementine let go of Tommy in favor of burrowing herself under Sean and started humming. Sean choked on a sob.

Tommy brushed one of his own tears away and leaned into Sean. He knew the danger was over, but every atom in his body was screaming at him to get as close as possible and never let go, and who was Tommy to argue with instinct?

“Looking at you tied up...” Sean trailed off, “I never wanna see that again.”

Tommy tapped Sean on the nose to catch his attention. “*Never again.*”

“How are you so calm right now? I should be the one comforting you right now, you fought against your worst nightmare and *I’m* sitting here crying?”

“I don’t think it’s hit me yet. You’ve had time to process, I’ve been asleep for...”

“Two days,” Sean whispered.

“Give me two days, then, I’m sure I’ll have plenty of breakdowns.”

Sean snorted. “That’s not what I meant.”

“I know what you meant. I’m just showing you that you’re being an idiot.”

There was a moment of silence, everything still except the slight vibrations that Clementine was given off as she slipped into sleep.

“Dream and those other two, not Wilbur, came for us at Ranboo’s house. Phil held them off, but... I thought he was dead until he joined the fight. He was covered in so much blood...”

Tommy squeezed him just a bit tighter. *“You’re okay. It’s over.”*

“And— and, we weren’t moving fast enough with— with the kids,” Sean’s voice was stuttering with sobs, “and then Dream said something and R— Ranboo’s eyes changed, and I knew it was either me or Clem.” Sean took in a shuddering breath. “So I distracted them while Foolish got them out safely.”

That’s right, Foolish was babysitting. Was he the one that struck Dream with lightning even without a thunderstorm?

“Wilbur came after, Dream didn’t t—tell him about, didn’t tell him much. He— he didn’t know there would be killing, I swear, he wasn’t trying—”

Tommy shushed him gently. *“I’ll deal with Wilbur later, it’s okay.”*

“They blindfolded me, an—and then you were there, oh my God, Tommy, that was your gravestone. You— you... the tower.”

Tommy’s heart dropped. Prime, the second he got a chance, he was going to tear down that stupid dirt pillar with his bare hands and then rebuild it so he could set it on fire.

“That was years ago, Sean, I’m alright now.”

Was he?

Sean shook his head. “Puffy told me what happened before the fight.”

Ah. Right. Well, maybe he wasn’t.

“You promised you would tell me if you were hurting,” Sean said.

Tommy closed his eyes, letting a tear slip down his cheek, and bent over to press his forehead into Sean’s shoulder. Prime, he was exhausted. He so desperately wanted to go back asleep so he could wake up and realize this was all a nightmare. Sean would tease him for stumbling into the spare— Sean’s room in the middle of the night, but he wouldn’t say anything when Tommy climbed under the sheets. Just a gentle arm wrapped around him. And then Sean would make coffee in the morning and Tommy would threaten to make tea even though he didn’t like it, and Clementine would wake up screaming because that child didn’t know the definition of silent, and—

Sean somehow leaned into Tommy further. “I could see it in your eyes. You gave up.”

“And you thought your death would help with that?”

Sean froze and then pulled back, rigid as ice.

Shit. Tommy did not mean to say that. But now that he had, he could feel the anger building beneath his ribs. Sean had tried to *fucking sacrifice himself*. What the fuck had that been about?

Tommy grit his teeth. *“You used my disability against me. You went against my wishes. You lied. Sean, how are you supposed to be angry at me for not sharing my very newly returned suicidal thoughts when you tried to offer yourself up like a lamb for slaughter?”*

“I thought it would be better, I just—”

“Your death would be better? Than what, Tubbo’s? What fucking delusion gave you that idea? I watched you die, Sean, that’s not something I can take lightly, and, in fact, I don’t even know how you’re alive right now!”

Tommy’s hands were flying, barely understandable between the slight tremors in his fingers and the rage that loosened his limbs.

Sean winced. “They got to Dream before he could mess with my respawns.”

“I still lost a life,” he added.

Tommy compartmentalized that information, promising himself that he’d give himself time to process Sean’s first true death, but Sean was avoiding his question, and Tommy needed to know.

“Yeah, because you sacrificed yourself.”

Sean wouldn't look him in the eye, instead choosing to stare very intently at his hands.

“You said it yourself, Tubbo is your best friend, you grew up and fought wars together. I know I'm important to you, but...”

“But what?”

Sean's face broke. “You didn't even call me your friend when we said goodbye. I thought—you don't need me to parent Clementine, no matter how much you think you do, and you've got so many friends here— Tubbo is practically family, and I didn't want to see you give that up out of some obligation you have to me or whatever it is that—”

Tommy didn't know if Sean trailed off or his brain simply refused to hear anything else that was coming out of his mouth. Had he really... Tommy tried to remember.

“Tubbo was, or is, I don't know, he's been my best friend, but you—”

Tommy recalled the inner debate he'd had over what title he could give Sean that would live up to how much he meant to him, and all Sean had heard was an empty silence.

He'd looked upset when they parted ways, and Tommy had ignored it.

Sean said he loved Tommy. With an axe to his neck and only a moment to live, that's the last thing he wanted to say.

Prime, Tommy was the stupidest, dumbest, most emotionally constipated fucking person to every live, and Philza “thanks mate” Minecraft was downstairs, so the bar was pretty fucking

low.

Tommy lifted Sean's head to look him directly in the eyes, because Sean needed to hear this and Tommy needed to say it.

"Sean, I didn't call you my friend because you're so much more than that."

"What?"

Tommy shook his head. *"Not like, romantically, Prime no. I don't need to be in love with you for you to be the most important person in my life. Because you are, Sean, you are without a doubt the best person, the best thing that's ever happened to me."*

Sean's eyes widened.

"And I'm not saying that because of Clementine or because I owe you or some dumb fucking bullshit like that. I'm saying it because it's true. I want to spend the rest of my stupidly boring life with you in our stupidly boring house—and yes, that's asking you to move in, can we both please stop pretending like you haven't already—I want to raise our daughter together, and I want to wake up when I'm an old, grouchy man and sit on our porch in matching rocking chairs that I carved for your birthday and tell exaggerated stories to the kids in the village about our actually stupidly boring life."

Tommy blushed. He may have gotten a bit specific.

He raised his hands, slightly shaking from adrenaline, and formed a sign that he knew in theory, saw it in the sign language books and memorized it with a bit of hope blooming in his chest, but had never actually signed except for in the mirror.

"I love you too."

Sean just sat there dumbfounded, mouth open like a fish. Tommy held back his gut instinct to make a joke about Wilbur flirting with him if he didn't close it soon. Just barely though.

Finally, once it seemed that Sean's brain cells had returned from their vacation, his response was, "You're making me rocking chairs for my birthday?"

Tommy rolled his eyes. *"For your thirtieth. Because you'll be old and your spine will be so frail that you can't stand, so I, young and spry Tommyinnit, will be so very kind and carve you a chair to be old in."*

"I thought you said you had one too?"

"I simply use it so you don't feel bad and alone."

Sean cracked a smile. "Ah, I see. Thank you for your endless kindness, then, I don't know what I would do without it."

Oh. Sean said that last bit pretty sincerely, actually.

"Do you want to get married? That seems like something people do when they mean forever."

"Marriage is a scam and a legal process, and I've never done anything legal in my life."

"You're in a mood, today," Sean said, but it was light-hearted.

Tommy still paused. *"If you want to, though. I meant when I said forever; I'd make that oath to you if you asked."*

Sean looked down at his lap, carefully brushing a piece of Clementine's hair away from her face as she slept. He looked so fond it hurt.

"Nah," Sean said, "I'm alright. I think you might burn if you try and step foot in a Catholic church."

Tommy grinned. *"Did you just call me a devil? Does that mean you'll be my angle?"* he teased, purposely using the wrong word, *"Please be my angle, Sean-y-poo."*

"I hate you."

"You loooooooooove me," Tommy kept his hands on his chest in the sign for "love" for way too long and basically shoved himself into Sean as if to draw out the 'o'.

Sean let himself get knocked into laying down, carefully cradling Clementine as he went.

"Yeah, I do," he said.

Tommy curled up next to him, joining Clementine in laying his head on Sean's chest. He watched her chest rise and fall along with the sprites in her chest. They were calm but bright, and Tommy realized that he could hear what they were synced with— Sean's heartbeat.

"I am sorry I don't have anything you call you, though," Tommy murmured, "You're just... my person, you know?"

"My person," Sean echoed.

Tommy hummed.

“I quite like that,” Sean said.

“Then you’re my person.”

And that was that.

Well, until Techno came barging in with practically the whole of the SMP following him, although they at least seemed apologetic, unlike Techno who stepped over Tommy and Sean without missing a beat.

“If you all needed help working out your QPR, you could’ve just come to Phil and I,” he grumbled, taking a seat at the table.

“Our fucking what now?” Tommy asked.

“Queer platonic relationship,” Phil said, “It’s like a friendship but a little different and a lot more important. That’s what Ranboo and Tubbo are.”

“Wait, we are?” Ranboo asked.

Techno rolled his eyes and muttered, “Children.”

“Phil, I thought you were married! Isn’t your wife like fucking Death or something? Was Wilbur lying to me again?”

Phil laughed. “No, mate, I am. I can be married to Kristin and be in a QPR with Techno. I don’t love either of them any less.”

And the way Techno was crossing his arms and starting fucking daggers at Tommy dared him to say something otherwise. Tommy didn't.

“Okay, glad we got all that cleared up—” they obviously hadn't, Tubbo and Ranboo were whispering quite loudly between each other “—and you all are done eavesdropping on very personal details about my relationship I only just expressed, why did you have to barge in on my very important floor cuddling session?” Tommy asked.

“We still have to figure out what to do with Dream,” Sam said, and every nerve in Tommy's body jumped into fight or flight.

He was scrambling for armor that wasn't in his inventory, probably saying something but he couldn't focus on his words, he had to get Sean and Clementine out, would the window be faster than the ladder or would that—

“Tommy!” Sean's hands were on his shoulders. “Dream is in prison. Everything is fine.”

All of the air rushed out of Tommy's body like he was a deflating balloon and he suddenly felt very, very tired again.

“You couldn't lead with *that* ?” he groaned.

Clementine started crying, obviously upset about her interrupted nap, but Ranboo was already teleporting across the room and back and she was on his shoulders with her hands deep in his hair.

Tommy just blinked.

Ranboo shrugged. “I'm her favorite uncle.”

“You let our child near *Ranboob* while I was unconscious?” Tommy asked incredulously.

“He’s a very good babysitter, in fact, you should meet Mi—”

Sam clapped his hands loudly. They shut up.

“Dream. In prison. What are we doing with him?”

Tommy felt a bit blindsided. With all the talk Niki has said, Tommy was surprised they’d let him live this long. Well, this life, at least.

“Uh, I don’t know, why are you asking me?” Tommy asked. He slid into a chair next to Puffy, Sean on his other side.

Techno gave a half-little wave. “I told everyone to back off until you got a chance to wake up. Figured you had the biggest right to revenge out of all of us.”

And, well, that was actually a really nice gesture from Techno, considering his whole stance on reciprocity and all that shit.

It didn’t help that Tommy had no fucking idea what to do.

“Can we— just give me a fucking minute to process that, okay?” Tommy turned to Phil. “I thought you were dead, what happened when we weren’t there?”

Phil grimaced.

A person on the far side of the table raised their hand. “I think I can explain that the best. I’m Foolish, by the way, it’s nice to meet you officially.”

Ah, so this was Foolish. He was some strange mix of hybrid traits or something else entirely. Tommy couldn't really tell. His skin was gold and eyes emerald— not just a bright green, but *emerald*, like someone had dug up two of the gemstones and stuck them in his sockets. Strangely enough, his hands were grey fins? Tommy blinked.

"I've been told you love to talk about chandeliers," Tommy said. Tubbo face-palmed.

Foolish's eyes took on an unnatural gleam. Okay, so not human. Got it.

"Have you ever built a chandelier? Cause I have, and I don't know if you—"

"Foolish!" Ranboo interrupted, "The story!"

Foolish grinned, goofy and open, like a golden retriever. "Right! So Ranboo, Michael, Sean, Clementine and I were in Techno's bunker, but Ranboo was unconscious. I guess Dream could control him in his sleep, because Ranboo started shaking like he was seizing, so I ran out of the bunker to get help, but that just let Dream and the others in."

"We were close enough to call to Phil for help, but Punz ambushed him. I was trying to hold off Dream and Purpled, but then Ranboo went all crazy with the glowing eyes and the 'grrrrr, I'm an enderman' thing, you know, so there was only so much I could do. Sean must have realized Dream was after him and Clementine, so he used himself as a distraction—" Tommy whacked Sean upside the head "—while I got Michael and Clementine out to safety. At this point I thought Phil was dead or close, so after Dream and the others left I went to help him," Foolish gestured to Phil.

Phil nodded. "Punz knew that I had a totem, so he forced me to pop it and then kept attacking. I knew he was going to try and kill me permanently, so I took a hit on purpose and acted like it basically killed me. Punz thought he left me bleeding out, but the idiot forgot I'm a paranoid bastard who's best friends with two protective, unfairly rich people. Anyway, I popped the second totem."

Tommy had heard of totems, but he honestly thought they were all rumors made by people that didn't know how healing potions worked, but apparently they were true.

“I was in the middle of helping Phil when the death messages started popping up and we knew you all needed help,” Foolish said, “so I left the kids with... a trusted friend, and Phil and I headed to Logstedshire.”

Tommy raised an eyebrow. “Trusted friend?”

There was a dark spot on the table that Tommy had assumed was a spilled potion or drink, but it started to move, congealing together until it formed a little blob of slime that vaguely looked like a child’s drawing of a human.

“Hello Tommyinnit from Nowhere!”

Tommy’s eye twitched. “This is your trusted friend?”

Foolish laughed nervously. “Well, you all needed all the fighters you could get, and Slime just happened to pop up when we needed him. Michael is a very responsible six year old, and Slime is very passionate about human anatomy!”

“Yes!” Slimecicle bobbed his head. “Foolish taught me that humans don’t bounce the other day!”

Tommy sighed, putting his head in his hands. “If Clementine wasn’t currently fine and looking too cute for me to get mad, you would be dead. Thank you, though, for keeping her safe.” He turned to Phil, “You too, old man. Glad you aren’t dead yet.”

Phil grinned the insult off and shrugged. “No harm done, in the end. Well, Techno and Ranboo haven’t left me alone and I doubt they will for the next month, but I’ll be alright.”

Techno froze with his hand hovering over a pocket in Phil’s robe. Tommy spotted a glint of gold before he pulled it away. Actually, now that Tommy was looking, Phil was definitely

more... *shiny* than normal.

Tommy's stomach dropped. "Where's Sapnap?" Puffy and Sam were at the table, but there wasn't any sign of Sapnap. Was his return a hallucination?

"Relax, Tommy," Puffy said, "He's guarding the prison right now, he's fine."

"But he died trying to help me, how do—"

Puffy shook her head. "Everyone went into that fight knowing that it could be their last. We all had three lives and only lost one. It was going to happen eventually, and I'm glad it was for a good cause. I know Sam and Sapnap feel the same way."

Sam gave him a tired smile from across the table. "It wasn't your fault, Tommy."

"How did we even win the fight?" Tommy asked, "I mean, with Ranboo being all..."

Ranboo winced.

"Sorry, big man, but honestly, what happened?"

Tubbo grinned, sharp and victorious. "Dream might be able to influence Ranboo's enderwalk, but apparently it has a soft spot for me. We figured out he won't hurt me, and I can even break Dream's influence."

Tommy snorted. "That is the dumbest 'love conquers all' bullshit I've ever heard."

"What can I say," Tubbo said, throwing an arm around a violently blushing Ranboo, "my husband looooooves me."

“Please, Tubbo, think of the children.”

Tubbo stuck his tongue out at Tommy, and Tommy was about to quip something back when he noticed the glint of metal hovering near Ranboo’s shoulder. What was that, another totem? But then it moved, flexing like tendrils and it was attached to—

Oh Prime.

Tommy could feel the blood drain from his face. “Tubbo...”

The laughing in the room stopped, Tubbo dropping his conversation to start scanning Tommy for something wrong.

“Tommy, are you—”

“Your hand...” He couldn’t say anything more than that.

“Oh!” Tubbo removed his arm from Ranboo’s shoulder and showed off the new metal prosthetic attached to his forearm. “Do you like it? It’s not fully done yet cause Ranboo wouldn’t let me stay up all night but I can do this!”

Tubbo flipped Tommy off with a very shiny netherite finger, complete with the hum and glow of redstone beneath the surface. He was grinning like he hadn’t just *fucking got his hand cut off two days ago*.

Tommy shook his head. “How are you okay with this?”

Tubbo shrugged. “I reckon I can make a better hand than my old one.”

“But...”

“But nothing, Tommy,” Tubbo said, “It happened and I would do it again, okay?”

Tommy took a deep breath. “Okay.”

It wasn’t but, he figured, maybe, it could be.

Prime, so much had happened, and it felt like his brain was going to burst from how much it had to deal with. Sean, Tubbo’s hand, Dream, Wilbur, all of them. It was like he wasn’t really processing everything, just taking in the information for a later date. Tommy figured it was his body’s way of coping or protecting him, and he honestly appreciated it. He had shit to get done.

Wait. Wilbur?

Fuck, *Wilbur* .

“What happened with... Wilbur,” Tommy asked, almost trailing off before he said his name.

Phil winced. “Ah. That’s... a bit complicated.”

Of course it was.

“Tell me anyway, he almost killed Sean, I have a right to punch him in the fucking face.”

“He didn’t want—”

Tommy cut Sean off. “I know, that doesn’t make him innocent.”

“Niki is currently watching him,” Phil said, “I tried talking to Will back in Logstedshire, but he kept getting more and more erratic until he had a seizure.”

“What the fuck— a *seizure*?”

Phil sighed, “From what I could understand of his rambling, apparently the afterlife works differently than here. Time moves faster, much faster. He’s been trapped in his own personal hell for, well, I think thousands of years.”

The breath in Tommy’s chest disappeared. *Thousands of years?*

“He’s going through a breakdown right now, understandably. Apparently it was quite dark and quiet where he was, so he’s just got sensory overload dialed up to the max. Niki and I have been... trying, but he’s not very coherent right now.”

Most of Tommy’s anger seemed to drain out of himself. He remembered how twitchy Wilbur had been and his seemingly shattered psyche. Prime, he had been alone for longer than a human should be alive by quite a lot. No other voices or touch. No hugs.

But still, he’d threatened Sean, and that’s not something Tommy could forgive lightly.

“He’s safe, though?” Tommy asked.

Phil nodded. “As safe as he can be.”

“Okay.” Tommy pushed a breath out, trying to sort everything out in his brain. Wilbur was alright, he could deal with that later. Tubbo, Sam, and Sapnap were okay, though Tubbo was

probably shoving all his feelings down and hiding behind his excitement for invention. That's alright, it would take time for him to talk, Tommy didn't need to push now. Clementine was fine, in fact, she was currently having the time of her life playing with Ranboo's ears.

Sean was alive, and they were okay, and although Tommy desperately wanted to pull him close and cry his fucking eyes out and never let go, he could wait a little bit longer. Not very long, but long enough to deal with Dream.

Tommy had no idea what he wanted to do. Sure, he wanted to kill Dream painfully and slowly, but...

"Techno, you said the prison was awful to stay in, right?" Tommy asked.

Techno nodded. "Yeah, you're trapped in a hot cage of obsidian without your items or anything, fed raw potatoes, surrounded by lava, nothing to entertain yourself, generally allowed to be tortured, all the fun stuff. Thanks for that, by the way," he said, looking at Sam.

"Dream's orders, sorry dude."

Techno hummed thoughtfully. "You know, Tommy, leaving him there to rot is probably a worse punishment than death. Not as satisfying as running him through with a sword, but, you know."

Tommy winced. Eternal torture, well, it may have been something that the old Tommyinnit would have agreed to, but not anymore.

"And there aren't any other prisons?" Tommy asked.

Sam shook his head. "None that would hold him."

Tommy glanced at Sean, trying to gauge his opinion. Dream had killed Sean; he had every right to want the man dead, and if Sean asked, Tommy would do it.

Sean looked a little sick, honestly, exactly how Tommy felt. “*Torture?*” he mouthed to Tommy, eyes wide.

“I appreciate the offers, guys,” Tommy started, “but things work a little differently outside the SMP. Generally, torture and murder aren’t exactly supported.”

Puffy smiled sadly, putting her hand on Tommy’s. “He abused you, Tommy, it’s okay.”

Tommy pulled his hand away. “I know that. I’m not still fucking brainwashed or something. It’s just— how can you all feel comfortable putting Dream through basically the same thing that he did to me?”

“What do you mean?”

“Torture! Isolation! Keeping your things from you! Restricting food! Again, *isolation* ! Has it not fucked Wilbur and I up enough for you all?”

Phil frowned, “That’s different, mate, Dream—”

“But it’s not!” Tommy shouted, “I’m not saying he deserves a second chance or some shit— I never want to see him again, actually— but no one deserves eternal torture or that bullshit. Dream should suffer the consequences of his actions, and we’ll need to do something to keep him from doing the same thing again, but I don’t want him dead or in the prison. I’m not putting him through exile 2.0, not when I know how it feels.”

Tommy paused, manually breathing after his outburst. “I know how it feels to be at your lowest. I know what it's like to feel subhuman.” He squeezed Sean’s hand under the table. “And I know what it feels like to have someone treat you like a person after all that. I hate it, but Dream deserves that.”

The room was silent, the people around the table taking the information in. Tommy could see some of them were less than pleased with what he'd said, but surprisingly, no one seemed to be shouting yet.

Techno made eye contact with Tommy, his head tilted in thought. "He's right about the prison. No one deserves that, and no one should have that much power over someone."

"It's not like we can just sentence him to community service like Jack and Fundy," Niki snorted, "well, like Fundy once he actually shows up."

Quackity threw his hands up. "Why can't we just kill him, then? I'll do it if Tommy won't."

"No! You missed my whole point!"

"He's killed people!"

Tommy laughed bitterly. "From what I've heard, you almost executed Techno. I highly doubt there was a trial or proper judicial system."

"Well he killed people too!"

Tommy stood, slamming his hands on the table. "So what!" he shouted, "we just keep killing each other until there's no one left? Everyone here has reason to hate each other because you all seem to think you have a right to absolute retribution! This whole 'eye-for-an-eye' shit isn't justice for anyone, it's just a promise for future violence. You all have got to sit down, get your heads out of your asses where they've been stuck for *years*, and TALK TO EACH OTHER."

He flopped back into his chair, breathing heavily.

“Ender fucking Prime,” Tommy muttered, “So, no prison and no murder. Anyone got any other ideas?”

Sam hesitantly raised his hand. “I could try and make the prison a bit more... liveable? Though I’m pretty sure he’ll be able to escape if I give him any sort of leeway.”

“So that’s a no,” Puffy said, “I support your decision, Tommy, but if it endangers you, it’s not happening.”

“Fine. Anything else?”

Tubbo spoke up, “I’ve been working on a tracker for Michael, it’s almost finished, and I could definitely replicate the design and make it Dream-proof.”

“How did you do that?” Sam said, leaning forward.

“I simplified loadstones, basically. You know the wiring components at the base, the ones that wrap under the netherite, right? If you take them out of the shell and get a comparator to lower the—”

“Okay, science shit later,” Tommy said, “does it work?”

Tubbo nodded. “If you all give me an item, I can make a compass that tracks it. You’ll just have to make sure Dream can’t get rid of it.”

“We can’t just let him roam around the server, he’s powerful with or without items.”

Tommy frowned. “No exile 2.0, remember?”

The group paused.

“I...” Quackity trailed off. “Sapnap and George have been talking about moving away from the SMP.”

“What? Why?” Sam asked.

“They feel guilty about Dream, and this place isn’t exactly helping Karl’s situation.”

Tommy poked Puffy in the side and whispered, “What happened to Karl?”

“Time travel,” she whispered, “it fucked up his memory. And then Sapnap and his engagement with Quackity...” she looked up, “went on pause.”

Tommy tuned back into the main conversation.

“—be best for everyone. It’s not like Kinoko Kingdom means anything to them, it’s a ghost town full of bad memories.”

Quackity paused.

“I think I might go with them.”

The room erupted.

“What about Las Nevadas?”

“What?”

“Is the engagement back on?”

Quackity held his hands up, trying to pacify everyone. “Jeez, guys, slow down. Las Nevadas can run without me.” He smiled bitterly. “You all never really needed me for it.”

Sam shook his head. “That’s not true.”

“It is, and it’s okay. I talked with Sapnap yesterday, and... I think it’s a good idea to step back from some responsibility for a bit.”

Slimecicle turned solid again and wormed his way onto Quackity’s shoulder in a matter of seconds. “Will you be Quackity from L’manburg again?”

Quackity winced, the scar on his face wrinkling around his eyes and mouth. “No, Slimecicle. I think I’ll just be from Nowhere.”

“Sometimes Nowhere is the best place to be from!” Slimecicle exclaimed, oddly cheery. “Dap me up!”

“You don’t have any arms.”

“Dap me up!”

Quackity sighed and smacked Slimecicle so hard on his forehead that the little blob went flying out of the room. Tommy heard the split second of a “wheeee!” as he passed by, and then silence.

“Okay then,” Techno said, looking as if this was the last place in the world he wanted to be, “it’s settled then. Tubbo will make a tracker, and until then, Sam will try and treat Dream as well as he can. Quackity the others can escort Dream out of the SMP and find somewhere to settle down. Dream won’t be allowed back. Any objections?”

No one said anything.

“Great. No one try and murder me for a week,” he grumbled, “I wanna take a nap.”

With that, Techno and Phil left the room.

Tommy felt like he had run eighty marathons in just a few hours. Really, it felt like he ran those marathons and then got hit by a truck, and then a jet plane piloted by someone with really bad road-rage. Or air-rage. Whatever.

He dropped his head on the table and groaned.

“You should probably take a nap,” Sean said, “you’re still recovering.”

“Whose house are we even in?” Tommy grumbled.

“Mine,” Niki said, “you’re welcome to stay for a few days, it’s not like I have many other guests coming over.”

Tommy heard the scraping of chairs as the others stood up and left the room. A hand patted his back, which he assumed was Puffy.

Something nudged his head gently, and Tommy looked up. Tubbo was gently headbutting him, a grin on his face.

“Tell me when you’re feeling better, big man, I want you to meet Michael.” He flexed his metal hand. “And we gotta figure out what cool shit I can add to this.”

Tommy snorted. “Yeah, I’ll see you in a bit, Tubbo.”

Ranboo managed to hand a very squirmy and wriggly Clementine to Sean without much screaming, thankfully. “She’s welcome to come over for a playdate anytime.”

“Thank you.”

Tubbo headbutted him one last time, wrapped his arm around Ranboo’s elbow, and headed out.

Sean pulled Tommy out of his chair by his arm and practically dragged him to the ladder.

“Come on, you are not falling asleep on Niki’s floor.”

“And what if I am?”

“She’ll feed you to the wolves.”

Tommy shook his head. “The dogs love me. I am the biggest man, and alpha recognizes alpha.”

“Please never say that again,” Sean joked.

They climbed down the ladder into the room that Tommy woke up to. Clementine was already sleepy, rubbing at her eyes and generally denying any existence of said sleepiness.

Sean wrapped a blanket around her, kissed her closing eyelids, hummed about three seconds of her favorite song, and she was out.

“Thank goodness,” he breathed, “I did not have the energy to fight her on that tonight.”

Tommy snorted, resting his head on Sean’s shoulder. “There are like twenty babysitters in shouting distance.”

“I...”

Tommy stood up, blinking the sleep away, and really looked at Sean. “What?”

Sean crossed his arms defensively, and the tips of his shoulders rose just barely.

Tommy pulled him into a hug. “You’re my person, and I love you. What’s wrong?”

“I just wanted a normal night as a family,” Sean whispered.

Tommy hugged him tighter. “That sounds like a great idea.”

They climbed into bed, placing the bundle of Clementine in her favorite spot, tucked under Tommy’s chin with Sean’s arm wrapped around to place a hand on her chest. Sean pulled the blankets over them.

The dark felt too loud.

Tommy fidgeted, his body tired but his mind racing a million miles an hour. Had he done the right thing about Dream? He would've loved revenge, but he didn't want to be like Dream. But what if Dream got away? What if he was never really free?

He hadn't even realized his breathing had picked up speed until Sean shifted the hand around Clementine to rest on his chest.

"Tommy, slow down your breathing," Sean said.

Sean's head was on the ground in front of him. There was blood on his hands. Sean's blood.

"Tommy."

"You died," Tommy whispered, shuddering, "I saw you die."

Sean pulled him close. "I'm okay. We're okay."

Tommy couldn't stop shaking. This felt awful, like every centimeter of his body was screaming at him that something was wrong, because there was still a few bits of dried blood under his fingernails, and Tommy remembered it dripping off his fingertips and blood on Techno's axe and blood on the ground and blood on Tubbo and blood on Sean and blood and blood and red and—

There was warmth all around him. Arms pulling him close, tucked into a chest. Blankets that felt worn from love and use but warm all the same.

"I've got you," Sean murmured, "you're alright."

Tommy cried.

“Dream, h—he was gonna k—kill you and Tubbo, and I felt lik—ke I was, was *dying*, and he said—” Tommy cut off, sobbing.

“I’m so sorry, Tommy.” Sean pressed Tommy’s head into his shoulder, fingers in Tommy’s hair.

“He said he w—would cut— cut my vocal chords out and wa—watch me struggle. I couldn’t do *anything* . Prime, I... I felt so h—helpless.”

Sean started humming, just letting Tommy push the words out.

“I don’t think...” Tommy trailed off.

Sean paused in petting Tommy’s head. “Think what?”

“I don’t th—think I can do this anymore.”

Sean froze.

Tommy shuddered, full body shakes rolling across his body. “I don’t w—wanna die, Sean.” Tommy curled in on himself, pressing into the warm body around him. “Please, I don’t want to die.”

“You’re going to be okay, I promise.”

“But—”

“You’re the strongest person I know, Tommy,” Sean whispered, “you’ll get through this, and I’ll be at your side the whole time.”

Tommy pushed a breath out and forced his whole body to relax, melting into Sean. He focused on his heart rate and just sat quietly, not wanting to say anything just yet.

Sean didn't move or speak either, but Tommy could tell he was still awake, waiting for Tommy. Prime, how did he ever manage to deserve his love?

Tommy remembered a conversation he'd had with Sean a year or so ago, just after they'd taken in Clementine.

"What if she doesn't love me?" Tommy had said, holding the sleeping baby with trembling hands.

Sean, who had been bustling around the room looking for a bottle, stopped.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't... What if I'm a shit father? I haven't done anything to deserve her love."

Sean walked over to them and placed a gentle hand on Tommy's shoulder.

"Tommy, you can't *deserve* love, it's unconditional, crap dad or not. People that are struggling, even if they're struggling to be good, they need to be loved too, okay? Because that's what makes us good, the people around us."

And Tommy had mumbled something about Sean being a sap, and he hadn't believed the words at the time.

He thought he might now.

Tiny tremors still wracked his figure every minute or so, but he was calming down. He could do this.

“Tell me I’m going to be okay,” Tommy whispered.

“You’re going to be okay.”

Tommy nodded, swallowing. “I’m going to be okay.”

Sean wiped the tears off of his cheeks with his thumb.

“I love you,” Tommy murmured, his eyes closing.

Sean smiled. “I love you too.”

And they slept.

Chapter End Notes

THERE'S AN EPILOGUE DON'T UNSUBSCRIBE WE'VE GOT ONE MORE LEFT
HEHEE

So I know some people aren't gonna like my decision about dream, so I thought I'd explain it from my pov. A lot of dsmp fans are american, and britain and america especially have a view on legal punishment that differs from the rest of the world. I'm american, but I've always been wary of the death penalty and life sentences because of Bryan Stevenson and his book Just Mercy. It's a heavy read but a good one, and there's a movie about it. I got to see him speak about three years ago and it really impacted my view on prisons and such. Anyway, I did a ton of research into prisons in Norway and similar countries, especially for people convicted of abuse, murder, sexual assault, etc, and even those crimes are illegal to give life sentences to. I couldn't in good conscious give Dream a punishment I wouldn't agree to in real life (not that liking dream in prison

means you support that in reality). Unfortunately, it's a tough problem that i don't think there will ever be a perfect answer to. On top of that, I think that after all the years that Tommy got a second chance and a place to heal, he wouldn't easily kill or torture (or let those things happen to) Dream. I hope it all came through well in Tommy's dialogue. I know lots of yall were hoping for Tommy to kill dream or smth like that, but sorry, no satisfying revenge, just personal growth and the realization that more death isn't going to make him better.

Happy ending tag comes in clutch once again! This was never gonna end with Tommy dying, or anyone dying permanently. That would just ruin the point of the healing and such, and wouldve made me angry if I was a reader lol. Don't worry, they were always going to be okay.

So if anyone had been keeping track, this story was supposed to take place over four years, right? Well, we only just got past three. If you had counted, you would have known there was a secret epilogue hehee (but i dont blame yall for not that timeline was fucked to keep track of)

AGAIN, CHECK OUT THE NEW FIC "FLICKERS" its from Sean's pov and you're gonna get some more yummy, yummy angst that I know yall love.

I hope you all enjoyed, and thank you for reading the very last "chapter" of Vibrations. I'll see you all for the epilogue (the actual last chapter, I promise /srs)

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Tommy glanced down at the frankly absurd amount of children clinging to his legs as he tried to move around the room.

“Misuko, you’ve gotta help me, I’m trapped.”

Chapter Notes

It's been an amazing ride. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for sticking with me through this all. It means more to me than you'll ever know. As always, I hope you enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Nine months later...

Tommy glanced down at the frankly absurd amount of children clinging to his legs as he tried to move around the room.

“Misuko, you’ve gotta help me, I’m trapped.”

Misuko barely glanced up from where she was cleaning glasses in the backroom sink. Thankfully, she’d gotten some more hands to help out at the bar, even if they were small, but she still seemed to be perpetually busy. Hence why Tommy was looking after the kids— and he was much better with them, to be honest.

“Oh I’m so sorry, Tommy,” Misuko teased, “my hands are just too full. Maybe I wouldn’t be so busy if someone hadn’t convinced me to turn my bar into basically an orphanage.”

One of the kids, a newer arrival whose name Tommy couldn't remember, scrambled up his leg like a mountain goat and wrapped their arms around his hips.

"Ow, ow, ow, *ow*," Tommy pushed them off, semi-gently, of course, but kids mostly bounced. Sure enough, they were off the floor and cheering in seconds.

Misuko snorted. "It also might help if you put down their lunch, idiot."

"Ah." That was what he was forgetting.

Tommy put the plate down on the wooden table he carved to just barely fit into the already cramped room, tiny chairs and all. The kids all found a seat, and Tommy could never understand why they all treated it like a game of chairs when there were *plenty of seats*, *Michael, please stop pushing her, you'll get your cookies*.

Eventually, mouths became full of food instead of playful screams, and Tommy let out a sigh.

"Any word on when Callum will be back?" Tommy asked.

Misuko shrugged. "He said he was gonna stay out later and later now that it's getting colder again." Tommy almost said something, but Misuko just rolled her eyes. "He's a big boy, Tommy. He'll be alright."

Tommy fidgeted. "He brought his coat, right?"

"Yes."

"And he knows to avoid that inn on Winespring, right?"

“Yes, you’ve told him a thousand times.”

“And—”

“Tommy, he’s okay.” Misuko set down the glasses to put her hands on his shoulders and look him in the eyes. “I even gave him my knife just in case.”

Tommy took a deep breath. Some days it was still hard to get a handle on his anxiety, but the people around him had their ways of calming him down, and Misuko’s involved blunt reassurance and giving children literal murder weapons.

“I would have kept it if I knew you were gonna give it to the kids,” Tommy said, but his tone was light and he cracked a smile.

“Like you have any need for it,” Misuko said, “Mr. *I Made A Mature and Morally Righteous Decision*. I would’ve just stabbed him.”

Tommy just rolled his eyes. “You’d stab me given the chance.” He paused, looking at the kids at the table trying to pretend they weren’t listening. “You’re good for the week, though?”

“Yes, oh my God, go take care of your *actual* child.” Misuko whipped him playfully with her wet dish rag.

Tommy glanced at the clock. *Shit*.

He grabbed his pack, scrambling for his coat. “I’m late, I’ll see you on Sunday!”

“Don’t kill anybody too hard!” Misuko called, but Tommy was already out the door. He untied his horse, Sean’s horse really, but *what’s mine is yours* and all that. He was still getting used to it, the idea of *together* and *forever*.

The ride back to the village was boring and cold, and the wind was worse at the pace he was pushing the horse. He was not about to be late.

Tommy handed the horse to the stablehand, a new addition to the slowly growing village, tossed an emerald at him, and dashed off to the house.

It hadn't changed much since Sean had officially moved it. He had wanted to get rid of the spruce door, considering how horribly it clashed, but Tommy spouted something about memories and some other bullshit, and the monstrosity had stayed. Tommy may have matured from cobblestone and mud, but he wasn't about to have a perfect looking house like some dickhead.

Tommy unlocked the door and tossed his pack onto the table. He unloaded everything he got from the city, supplies, groceries, a very cute drawing a kid made of him and Clementine that he most certainly did not cry about, etc. He grabbed a few of Clementine's favorite snacks, a set of knit gloves and hat, and his waterproof boots.

A thud sounded outside along with a very faint "*darn!*" that Tommy snorted at. He grabbed the pack, slipped his boots on, and headed back outside.

Ranboo was right outside by the inconspicuous ender pearl stasis pool disguised as a small fish pond shaking water out of his suit pant leg. He looked a little miffed.

"Having fun there, Ranboob?"

Ranboo looked annoyed but as soon as he saw Tommy his face brightened— and then immediately schooled itself into fake anger.

"We're going back to Snowchester in December, this is gonna turn into ice in an instant."

Tommy grinned, pulling his hat and gloves on. “Sounds like a personal problem.”

“I’m gonna start paying a taxi service charge if I keep getting wet,” Ranboo grumbled, but he pulled an ender pearl out and tossed it into the pool without complaint.

“Aren’t you rich?”

“Shut up.” Ranboo smiled. “You ready?”

“As always.”

Ranboo walked over, grabbed Tommy’s arm, and they blinked in and out of existence.

The world shifted, and then they were standing outside a giant mansion in the tundra next to an identical ender pearl stasis pool. Tommy started shivering in seconds but ignored it in favor of looking at the snowflakes slowly drifting down from the sky.

He had forgotten how... quiet it could be. The snow dampened everything, enclosed the sky. It made Tommy feel like he was standing in an old church, one who’s carpet was well worn from dress shoes and kneeling knees, red brick and low ceilings. Cozy. Enclosed, but in a way that didn’t trigger his claustrophobia.

A hand rested on his shoulder. “Coming?”

“Sorry,” Tommy shook himself and followed Ranboo inside. “The village doesn’t get snow. When I first came back I thought Quackity had covered the whole SMP in cocaine.”

“That’s not– nevermind. I’m pretty sure they’re up in Michael’s room. I’ve got to finish lunch, it should be ready in about ten minutes— you can find your way, right?” Ranboo asked.

Tommy grumbled. “I got lost *once* . Besides, it’s your fault for having a big ass mansion, mister one-percent.”

“I can print out a map if you’d like!” Ranboo called, walking away. Tommy could hear him suppressing his laughter.

Tommy flipped him off.

He made his way out the outrageously large and pompous staircase, and he weaved his way through a few hallways before he came to a stop outside Michael’s bedroom. There was a sign on the door, crayon on paper, and if Tommy hadn’t known what it said, he would’ve assumed Tubbo tried to draw a caterpillar with his eyes closed.

Tubbo had whacked him with his metal hand when Tommy said that and informed him that it was Michael’s name, written by the big man himself. Tommy had suggested a tutor. Tubbo whacked him again.

Tommy pushed open the door, quick to close it behind him.

“Tommy!”

“Daddy!”

Little arms wrapped around Tommy’s legs, and he was quick to lift Clementine onto his hip.

“Did you have fun today!”

Clementine nodded. “We went outside!”

Tommy made an exaggerated face of surprise. “Really? Did you play in the snow?”

“Yeah! Me and Tata threw snowballs at Tub and Michael! We won!” Clementine squealed.

Tommy looked over Clementine’s head at Sean and raised an eyebrow. Sean snorted into his fist and shook his head.

Clementine’s abilities didn’t work the best on fast-moving objects, which wouldn’t be a problem on its own, but she seemed to be under the impression that they did. So Tommy and Sean had become very good at pretending that Clementine was the next Michael Jordan.

“Good job, big girl! Did you say thank you to Tubbo and Michael for playing with you?”

Clementine shifted in Tommy’s arms so she was facing the others.

“Thank you,” she signed.

Tubbo’s eyes crinkled from his smile. “Thank you for coming, Clem. I’m glad you had a good time.”

Michael dropped the crayons he had been drawing with and ran over to Clementine, giving her a gentle hug. She hugged him tighter and smacked her forehead into his like she knew he liked. Michael squealed out of happiness and headbutted her back.

Tubbo had explained that Michael was afraid of hurting Clementine because of her size, but Clementine wasn’t the most self-aware and therefore had no restraint to keep from hurting herself. She was smart, though, and realized pretty quickly that Michael loved roughhousing, even if he didn’t say it.

It turned out he couldn’t say anything, actually.

Whatever piglin anatomy was in the throat and mouth kept Michael from using human speech. He could communicate in piglin grunts and such, but it wasn't a very nuanced language. Tommy taught him as much sign language as he could, but Michael's hooves prevented him from using some signs. Most, really.

So with the help of Sean and Ranboo, Tommy was making a special version of sign language for Michael. MSL, one might call it.

Still, the little piglin was pretty expressive and tended to prefer silent communication which was fine for everyone, including Clementine. Sometimes Tommy thought she was telepathic because the two kids could understand each other better than their own parents.

It also helped that Clementine and Michael were growing at different rates. Clementine was already way past the normal size for her age, and her mental growth reflected the same thing. Michael was developing slower, and whether that was because of his species, his slight zombification, or just an unrelated disability, they weren't sure. It didn't really matter in the end, because anyone with or without eyes could look at Michael and see how happy he was — especially when Clementine came over for playdates.

"I think lunch should be ready soon," Tommy said, "should we head down and say hi to Ranboo?"

Clementine wrinkled her nose. "Potatoes?"

Sean burst into laughter along with Tubbo who practically fell on the floor in laughter. Tommy felt a bit out of the loop.

Tubbo ruffled Clementine's hair, a thick mess that Sean and Tommy had yet to figure out how to manage.

"I think it's grilled cheese and carrots this time," Tubbo said, laughing.

Michael snorted something that sounded excited, grabbed Clementine by the arm, and tugged her out of the room.

“I’ve missed something,” Tommy pouted. Sean snickered.

Tubbo threw his arm over Tommy’s shoulder, leading out of the room to follow the kids.

“When Techno was last over, Sean managed to get Clementine to say she liked carrots better than potatoes. Except she took it a step further and wouldn’t eat the potatoes at all, insisting she doesn’t like them— which she clearly does cause if you just call them ‘taters’ she’ll eat a whole plate.”

Sean burst out laughing again, clearly proud of himself.

Tommy just shook his head. “You’re a terrible influence.”

“You should’ve seen Techno’s face,” he wheezed, “I think I ruined his whole week.”

Tommy flicked him in the side of the head. “Wasn’t punching him in the face enough for you?”

Sean grinned, something evil that Tommy rarely saw in him. “No.”

“If you get killed I’m just gonna say I told you so.”

Sean shrugged. “I’ll just tell Tubbo and then he won’t let Techno play with Michael.”

“I would do that,” Tubbo said, nodding, “the chaos would be immaculate.”

Tommy rubbed his head. “My worst mistake was introducing you two— no, my worst mistake was letting you come back here. It’s been a terrible influence on you.”

They turned the corner into the dining room where Ranboo was failing miserably to corral the two kids into their chairs. Clementine was refusing to see in her high chair and Michael just seemed to be supporting her reign of terror.

Ranboo looked up at them with helpless eyes. “I told her she couldn’t play with the knives and now she’s fighting everything I say.”

Sean ducked out of the room to fall into a ball of laughter, apparently in a very giggly mood. Tommy just rolled his eyes and picked up a screaming Clementine and plopped her into her chair. A few straps later, she realized she wasn’t able to wriggle out and stopped crying.

Ranboo breathed a sigh of relief. “I’m so glad we skipped the terrible twos with Michael.”

“Yeah, cause he was in a hole in the Nether!” Tubbo called from the kitchen.

“I’ll take away your desert!” Ranboo threatened.

Tubbo entered the dining room carrying plates of grilled cheeses. His metal hand had split into multiple tendrils of wires and iron, enough to balance everyone’s servings and a large bowl of carrots.

“That’s so fu—freaking sick,” Tommy exclaimed, “you’re the coolest man ever.”

He turned to Sean. “Can I get one?”

“No.”

“But look at it! I could harvest like eighty carrots a second with that thing!”

“Don’t give in,” Ranboo said to Sean, setting the plates on the table, “Tubbo keeps asking me if he can cut off his other hand because it just isn’t as efficient anymore.”

“It makes sense!” Tubbo whined.

“It literally doesn’t.”

“Carrots!” Clementine squealed, almost tipping her high chair over in order to grab a handful from the bowl.

Tommy flopped into his chair and took a bite of grilled cheese. “If you switched our daughter with a rabbit hybrid,” he said to Sean, “I’ll never forgive you.”

The conversation danced around as they ate, from bunnies to nuclear warheads to the best way to pack a snowball for maximum pain. It was refreshing to joke around with Tubbo and Ranboo again without the underlying pressure of politics and survival. It was also hilarious to see Sean slip into their dynamic without a splash, a breath of fresh air for a pragmatic Ranboo but also a partner in crime for Tubbo.

“You’re seeing Wilbur after this, right?” Tubbo asked.

Tommy nodded, mouth full of carrots.

“It’s almost three, big man, Puffy will be furious if he’s late for his therapy appointment again.”

Shit. Tommy glanced at the clock, and wouldn't you know it, the sun was practically at the top of the disc. How was he always running late?

He washed down the carrots with a big gulp of water and started to gather his plate, scattered and in a rush.

"Just leave it," Ranboo said, "I'll get it. Have a good time with Wilbur!"

"Thank you!" Tommy said, dashing out of the room.

He made his way out of the mansion and to the hyperbridge from Snowchester to the main SMP area. Prime, that thing had saved his ass so many times, cutting what should be a five minute boat ride to a ten second walk.

Tommy headed to the Nether portal, taking a route that was starting to become familiar again. What wasn't familiar was the new bridge in the Nether, winding around the others till it led to a shiny new portal.

Tommy stepped through, blinking at the bright light. The portal was mostly surrounded by trees, but Tommy's feet were resting on a lightly worn dirt path that slipped through a small break in the oak and birch.

He headed down it, double checking that he had his armor in his inventory and communicator up for emergencies. Wilbur hadn't ever been violent, necessarily, but in those first few months he was very desperate to get what he wanted, even if it meant hurting those around him.

Tommy pushed away the memory of Wilbur grabbing at his sword and aiming it towards his own stomach.

It'd been months since that, and almost two months since Wilbur's last attempt— and Tommy hadn't heard him express the desire in a few weeks. Puffy said he was doing better,

but better— as Tommy had learned all too well— was not a very linear thing. Still, Tommy was hopeful. Someone needed to be.

Wilbur's cottage came into view, tucked away in the never-ending cove of trees but nestled up against a small lake. It was peaceful and very, very far away from the SMP. Wilbur wasn't allowed access without supervision for his safety, but he hadn't expressed any interest in visiting and honestly seemed happy with the isolation.

Tommy had to remind himself that sometimes the things that Wilbur was happy about weren't good for him, which is why he was visiting in the first place.

He hadn't been allowed to see Wilbur for a while after... everything, for Tommy's mental health and Wilbur's *everything* health. Once they, they being Phil, Puffy, and Niki, figured out Wilbur had been stuck in limbo for a decade and was almost obsessed with getting back to Tommy, they all agreed a degree of separation was needed.

So Tommy hadn't been able to see his brother for what felt like an unfairly long time, and even if this version of Wilbur wasn't exactly the one he loved and remembered, he kept coming back.

Tommy knocked on the front door, plain birch, very bland in his opinion, and waited. Wilbur could be a little territorial, and he also forgot that the sounds around him could be made by real people now, so it was best to wait.

Sure enough, about a minute later, the door cracked open.

Wilbur looked like shit. And that was being nice, Tommy had seen Techno's dogs poop out something that looked better than the bags under Wilbur's eyes right now.

"Hey man, sorry I'm a bit late, can I come in?" Tommy asked.

Wilbur's eyes flicked behind Tommy, a sure sign that he was probably hearing or seeing something, and darted back. "Is it Sunday?"

"Yup," Tommy said, popping the p, "a little after three, just like always." Routine, that's what Phil said. Wilbur needed routine, something to hold on to when the rest of his world was an abstract painting of reality and hallucinations.

Wilbur opened the door, and Tommy stepped in. His house was a mess, an oddly organized mess, like Wilbur had gone through everything methodically like he was looking for something. Wilbur didn't say anything about it, just kicking the trash to the side and flopping down on the floor, arms crossed under his head. Tommy was confused for a second, looking for the chairs that norm— ah, they were in the pile.

Tommy sat down with him, just going with the flow.

It took Wilbur a few minutes to say anything.

"I was back there," he said, and Tommy knew he was talking about limbo.

They... well, no one really knew much about limbo. Phil said Wilbur described it as a dark train station to him, and both Puffy and Niki were tight-lipped about the topic, but Tommy had only heard limbo called "it" or "there".

"Yeah?" Tommy asked, trying to prompt Wilbur into talking more.

"I never... it hasn't shown me there since I left."

Okay, so that was new. "Do you know why that changed?"

Wilbur shrugged as best he could while lying down. "I know I don't— did you know that blood is cheaper than ink in 2b2t? Tubbo mentioned that once."

The sudden change in topic always startled Tommy, but he'd had enough practice, especially in the beginning, to take it with grace.

"I didn't. Did he tell you anything else?"

Wilbur scowled. "You don't have to talk to me like a child."

Tommy kept himself from fidgeting, knowing it set Wilbur off on bad days like this. "I'm not."

"You are."

"I'm keeping my sentences simple."

Wilbur huffed, throwing his arms over his eyes. "That's how you talk to a child."

"I talk to other people like this."

"I think I went back because I wanted to kill myself again," Wilbur said.

Tommy suppressed a flinch.

"Niki says I'm getting better but I know I'm not. And some days I think she's lying to me on purpose, trying to get on my good side so she can stab me in the back, and some days I think she just pities me. I would get on a train and it wouldn't go anywhere, did you know that?"

"I didn't," Tommy said quietly.

“Phil says I kept trying to kill myself because they wouldn’t let you visit. And then they would and he said it was because I wanted normalcy and that’s what limbo gave me. But it’s been months of the most normal and boring life I never wanted to have, and I woke up yesterday and thought about slitting my wrists with the knives you all won’t let me have. But I didn’t actually want to.”

Wilbur gestured towards the door in a way that made Tommy guess he wasn’t actually seeing the door. “I told them no.”

“The shadows?”

“Yes, the fucking shadows, Tommy, who else would it be?” Wilbur grinded the butt of his palms into his eyes and suddenly sat up, looking at Tommy with red but focused eyes.

“Does it get better?” Wilbur asked.

Tommy couldn’t keep the smile off his face. “Yeah Big Dubs, it does.”

“I’ll punt you if you’re lying.” Wilbur got to his feet, groaning, but he seemed much more coherent than he was just a minute ago.

Tommy stood up with him.

“You’re late,” Wilbur snapped, looking away from the clock on his floor that was somehow still working.

“Sorry,” Tommy tried to smile, something to lighten the mood, “I lost track of time.”

Wilbur flinched.

Right.

“Shall we?” Tommy asked, ignoring his blunder and holding out his elbow.

Wilbur slapped his arm away and stepped outside. “Stop doing that. I’m a danger to myself but I’m not going to fall and break a hip.”

Tommy’s stomach dropped. He didn’t like to think about those first few months, but Wilbur couldn’t help but joke about it. Actually, he definitely could, but Tommy was sure he kept talking about it in order to drive Tommy away. Which, considering how attached Wilbur was to him, didn’t really make sense. Puffy said that illnesses like Wilbur’s rarely made sense.

“You’re not a danger to yourself,” Tommy said.

“I tried to kill my—”

“You’re *not* a danger to yourself,” Tommy repeated firmly. “If you were, you’d have already done something stupid. But you haven’t, and you’re just saying that shit because the shitty part of your brain is trying to prove that I’ll leave you.”

Wilbur frowned. “I don’t think you’re going to leave.”

“Yes you do. Every time I’m late you think I’m never going to show up again, and we had to sedate you the first time I visited and tried to go home.”

“It was the first time I got to talk to you in almost a century!”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “*Oh, you’ll never leave me, right, Tommy? I’m Wilbur in Pogtopia, memememememe.*”

“I never said that,” Wilbur snapped.

“I’m not going to leave.”

“I never said you would.”

“Then why do you keep pushing me away?”

Wilbur paused. “I—”

Tommy shoved his hands in his pockets, trying to keep them from freezing in the winter air. “Puffy says you need to tell people exactly what you think, not what you think they want to hear. It’s one of your character flaws.”

“I liked you better when you didn’t have a basic understanding of psychology,” Wilbur grumbled.

“Stop changing the subject. Why do you push me away?”

“I don’t know! Why do you keep coming back?”

Tommy knocked Wilbur’s shoulder with his own, just enough to make him stumble. “I love you. You’re my brother. That’s why.”

“I hurt Sean.”

“I know.”

“I didn’t stop Techno at the festival.”

“I know.”

“I got Phil to kill me because I was too cowardly to do it myself,” Wilbur whispered.

“I know.”

Wilbur shook his head, looking at the ground. “Then you’re a dumbass for loving me.”

“Love is—”

“—unconditional, yeah, I know, it’s not like you’ve said it before,” Wilbur muttered, “It’s a bit harder in practice.”

Wilbur’s hands were turning pale without blood flow, and he wasn’t wearing any gloves. Tommy grabbed them by the fingers and winced at the frigid skin on his own.

“Big man, your hands are freezing.”

“Ah,” Wilbur said, “I didn’t notice.”

Tommy huffed, breathing into and slipping a spare pair of gloves on Will’s cupped hands. “They’ve got to be numb by now.”

Wilbur shrugged. “I don’t know. Everything feels like pins and needles now.”

Right, the sensory issues.

“Has Phil figured out anything for that?”

“No, apparently it’s a mental issue, not something wrong with the actual nerves, so potions won’t do anything. It’ll take time, just like everything else.” Wilbur sighed. “Sometimes I think they’re lying to me because they know if they tell me it’ll never get better I’ll stop trying.”

“Have you considered that it’s not getting better because you aren’t actually letting yourself believe it will?” Tommy asked.

Wilbur knocked his shoulder back. “Stop being smart.”

“Stop being dumb.”

“You’re such a fucking child.”

“And you’re an old, old man,” Tommy teased. “Couldn’t be me.”

Wilbur rolled his eyes. “You have a literal child. You’ve got a fucking house, for Prime’s sake, I just have that dumb fucking cottage that Phil built me.”

“Hey, I built that too!”

Wilbur paused, looking surprised. “You did?”

Tommy nodded. “Hitting hard things with more hard things is a very good stress reliever. I was stressed, Phil had nails, wood, and a hammer. It was a no-brainer.”

“What parts did you build?”

Tommy shrugged. “Does it matter?”

“Please?” Wilbur pouted, “Humor me?”

“Fine. I know I did the whole roof, maybe the kitchen floor. Oh, I did all the woodworking for the furniture. The bed frame, the table, those were me.”

Wilbur just gaped at him. “When did you learn how to do all that?”

“Sometime after my second suicide attempt,” Tommy said blithely. Okay, so maybe he got why Wilbur joked about it, it was fun to see the look on his face. Prime, his eyes went all scrunchy like someone kicked his dog.

“You’re not allowed to joke about that.”

Tommy raised his eyebrows. “And you are?”

Wilbur wrapped an arm around Tommy’s shoulders and pulled him close. “You’re my little brother, I don’t like thinking about you like that.”

Tommy snorted. “Yeah, me too.”

They stopped right outside Puffy’s office, and while Wilbur normally went straight in after a goodbye, he paused this time.

“You really are better now?” Wilbur asked, looking almost as if he didn’t want to hear the answer.

Tommy stepped forward and wrapped him in a hug. “I am. I promise. I might have some bad days, but I’m always getting better.” The implication hung in the air. *You can too.*

Wilbur held him tight and buried his face into Tommy’s shoulder, slouching to do it. Tommy stood on his tiptoes just slightly, adjusting for Wilbur’s comfort.

“You’re gonna be okay,” Tommy whispered.

Wilbur didn’t respond, but he released Tommy and slipped off the spare gloves. Tommy took them with an eye roll.

“You might as well keep them.”

Wilbur grinned. “And miss you fussing over me? Never.”

“Dumbass.”

“Dickhead.”

“I love you.”

Wilbur swallowed, breaking eye contact with Tommy and pretending to look at the landscape around them instead. “I love you too. Tell Sean I’m sorry, please?”

“I always do.”

Tommy waited to make sure he got inside, heard Puffy’s cheerful greeting, and set off down the Prime path to head back to Snowchester.

The SMP wasn’t very busy, always pretty lazy on Sundays, but Tommy gave Jack Manifold as he passed by the hotel. Jack waved back, a little stiff like always, but Tommy just tried to smile and move on. Jack was doing his community service, making something that would bring everyone on the server together and keep him busy. Tommy hoped it turned out well.

He didn’t see anyone else, so he took the hypertunnel back to Snowchester just in time to see everyone coming outside in bundles of winter coats and hats. Tommy could barely see Michael’s snout above his scarf.

“Hey guys!” he yelled, waving.

They waved back, especially Michael who had just learned what waving meant and was very excited to use it.

“Just in time!” Tubbo called, “We were gonna leave you behind!”

Tommy approached them and slipped his arm around Sean’s. “It’s my house!”

“ *Our* house, actually,” Sean teased.

Tommy sighed, looking dramatically at Ranboo. “Do you still have those divorce papers?”

“Always.”

“We aren’t even married!”

Tommy placed a hand on his chest like a delicate Victorian lady. “Alas, I may lose the house, but at least...” He picked Clementine up from behind, relishing in her squeal. “I got the kid!”

“Daddy! Daddy! Set me down!” she said, giggling like a madman.

Tommy dangled her so her nose barely brushed the top of the snow. “Did you say down?”

“No! Not snow!”

Tommy whisked her back up, placing her on his shoulders in a smooth movement that took way too long to master. “Oh, you said up?”

Clementine grabbed his hair and squealed. “Down, Daddy!”

“Ohh! You meant *down!*” Tommy set her back down on the ground and burst into laughter when she immediately face planted.

Karma struck because Clementine immediately started crying, so Tommy set her back up on her feet and brushed the snow off her face.

“Sorry sweetheart, I should’ve let you get your balance.”

“It’s cold,” she mumbled, burrowing into the collar of her coat.

Tommy glanced up. Sean was watching them with a horribly fond look on his face, and Tubbo and Ranboo were teaching Michael how to eat snowflakes.

“Alright, I think it’s time to go,” Tommy called.

Ranboo nodded, holding out his arms.

“See you next week!” Sean called.

“See you then!’ Tubbo replied. Tommy waved, making sure Michael waved back.

Tommy blinked, and they were back at the house. Ranboo was stepping out of the pool, already pulling out an ender pearl.

“Have a good night!” he said, tossed the pearl down in the water, and disappeared.

Tommy and Sean headed up their porch, arms still linked even with Clementine wiggling around in Tommy’s.

“Give Daddy a second,” he said, “we’ll get you warm in just a second.”

She mumbled something but it was lost in knit wool and sleepiness.

Sean unlocked the door and led them inside. The house was quiet but warm, thanks to the literal magic Phil had done to it.

“How does nap time before dinner sound?” Sean asked.

“Prime, I thought you’d never ask,” Tommy groaned, “it’s been the longest day of my life.”

Sean just laughed. “You were the one who agreed to do everything on Sunday.”

Tommy just flipped him off.

Clementine was already dozing off, so Tommy stripped her of her winter gear and set her in the crib. He took a moment to just look, taking in her peaceful form and sleepy sighs.

Sean came up behind him and rested his chin on Tommy’s shoulder, looking down at Clementine as well.

“Man, who thought we’d end up here,” Sean said.

Tommy snorted. *“You’re telling me.”*

Sean hummed. “Sometimes I wish I could travel back in time just to tell you that it would all be okay.”

“I don’t think I would’ve believed you.”

“God, you were so jaded. I still remember the dirty look you gave me when you fell on your butt harvesting carrots for the first time.”

“In my defense, you made it look difficult.”

Sean punched him in the arm. “Oh, shut up.”

“Thank you, though,” Tommy said.

“For what?”

“For saving my life, and then giving me one.”

Sean smiled. “Most of that was you. I think you’d be surprised at how much life there was in you even when you were closest to death’s door.”

“Maybe. But I’m glad you were there with me.”

Sean leaned back and tugged Tommy by his arm. “C’mon, sappy conversations can happen under the warm blankets on the sofa.”

“Are you never warm?” Tommy teased.

“Nope. You’re my space heater.” Sean pulled him onto the sofa and curled into his side.

Tommy sighed dramatically. *“I guess I can’t leave.”*

Sean yawned, digging his head deeper into the blankets. “You’re stuck with me.”

Tommy went to respond with some snarky comment, but Sean was somehow already asleep, practically curled up in Tommy’s lap.

“I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else,” Tommy whispered.

He leaned into Sean, soaking up the warmth, and closed his eyes.

The End.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long, but Thanksgiving break and right afterwards kinda fucked up my mental health for reasons that apparently will never be discovered lol. I'm writing this at 1 am the day before a final (which sounds bad) but I know I need to have this finished and off my chest. It's been too long lol, I need to write much more frequently. Anyway, that's the end. The actual, true, proper end. There's more in the universe, but there's no more plot after this. I've said what I wanted to say, I think. I hope. If you want more, check out the series, there will be more to come soon. And I know I'm going to start working on a new long project soon, because I don't know what rest is lol. (but i enjoy staying busy, don't worry)

I've never finished anything like this. My longest project was 50,000 words for nanowrimo, and its a stereotypical ya dystopian mess, because we all have to write one, right? This is something different, and I'm really, really fucking proud of it. I've kept telling everyone in my real life they couldn't read it, but I think I've changed my mind. Especially my mom.

So hi Mom! I hope you enjoyed, and I hope I didn't make you cry too much. Thanks for raising me to be the person I am, everything on this page couldn't have happened without you. And thanks to my roommate Emmaline for letting me rant about fanfics and DSMP politics even though she had no idea what I was talking about. I think you already found this because you are scarily vigilant, but here you go anyway. Everyone in the comments, give them some love because they deserve it.

Thanks to all my readers, new and old. All my commenters and lurkers, I'm so unbelievably grateful for what you've given me in this year. Thank you to everyone who made art and fanfics of my writing, I'm still in disbelief that that's my reality lol.

And finally, thanks to me. I was at my lowest, the worst ive ever been, a really shitty spiral of depression that didnt seem like it would end. And I pulled myself up. I had help from my friends and family and school, but ultimately, I did that. So thank you past me for not going through with some of the things you promised yourself, thank you present me for finishing this even when you felt a little shitty, and thank you future me for everything you're going to create. I can't wait to see what you do next.

- celestial <3

End Notes

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